



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

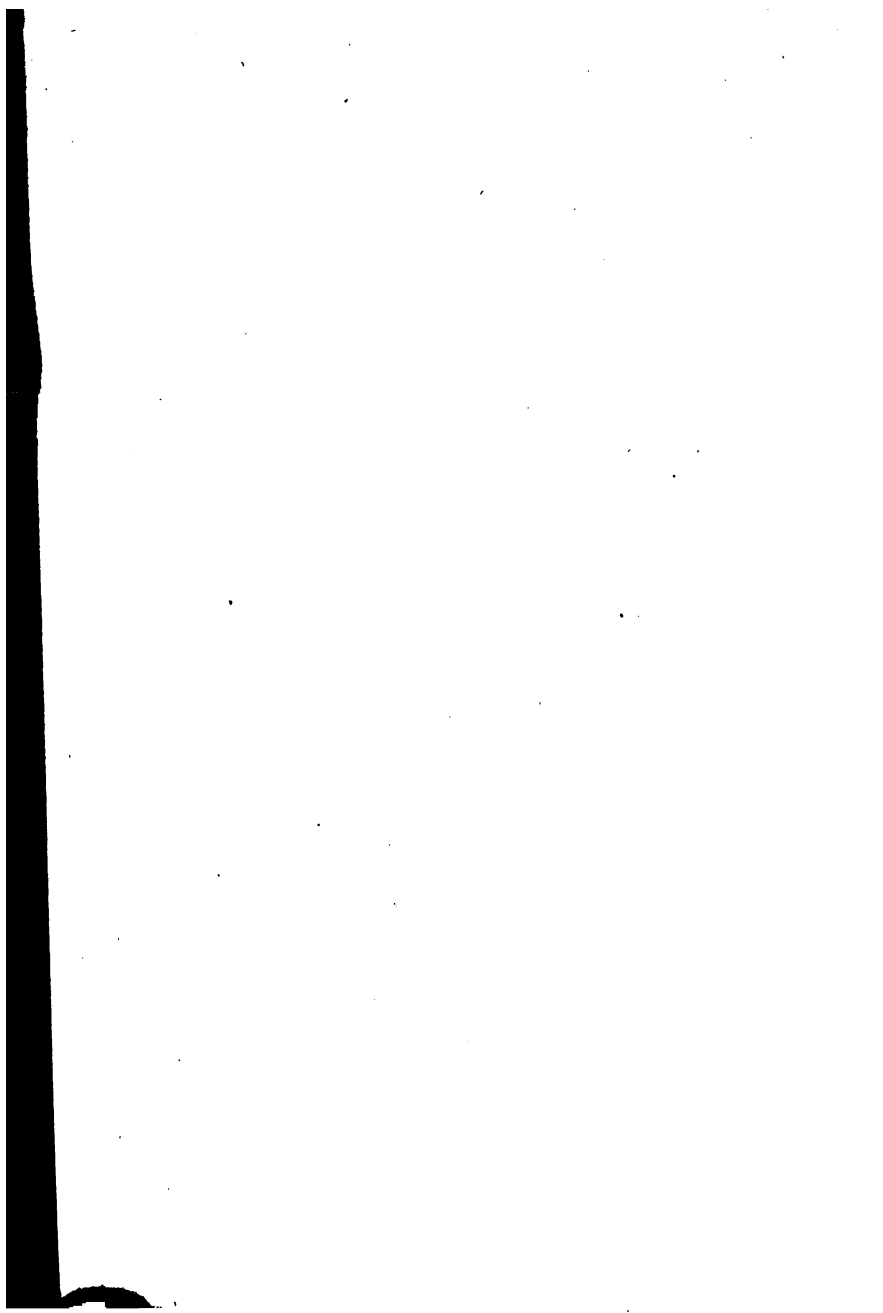
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





VIOLA.

VOL. II.



# V I O L A.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“CASTE,” “MY SON’S WIFE,” “PEARL,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1869.

*The right of Translation is reserved.*

250 . x . 25.

LONDON  
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,  
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

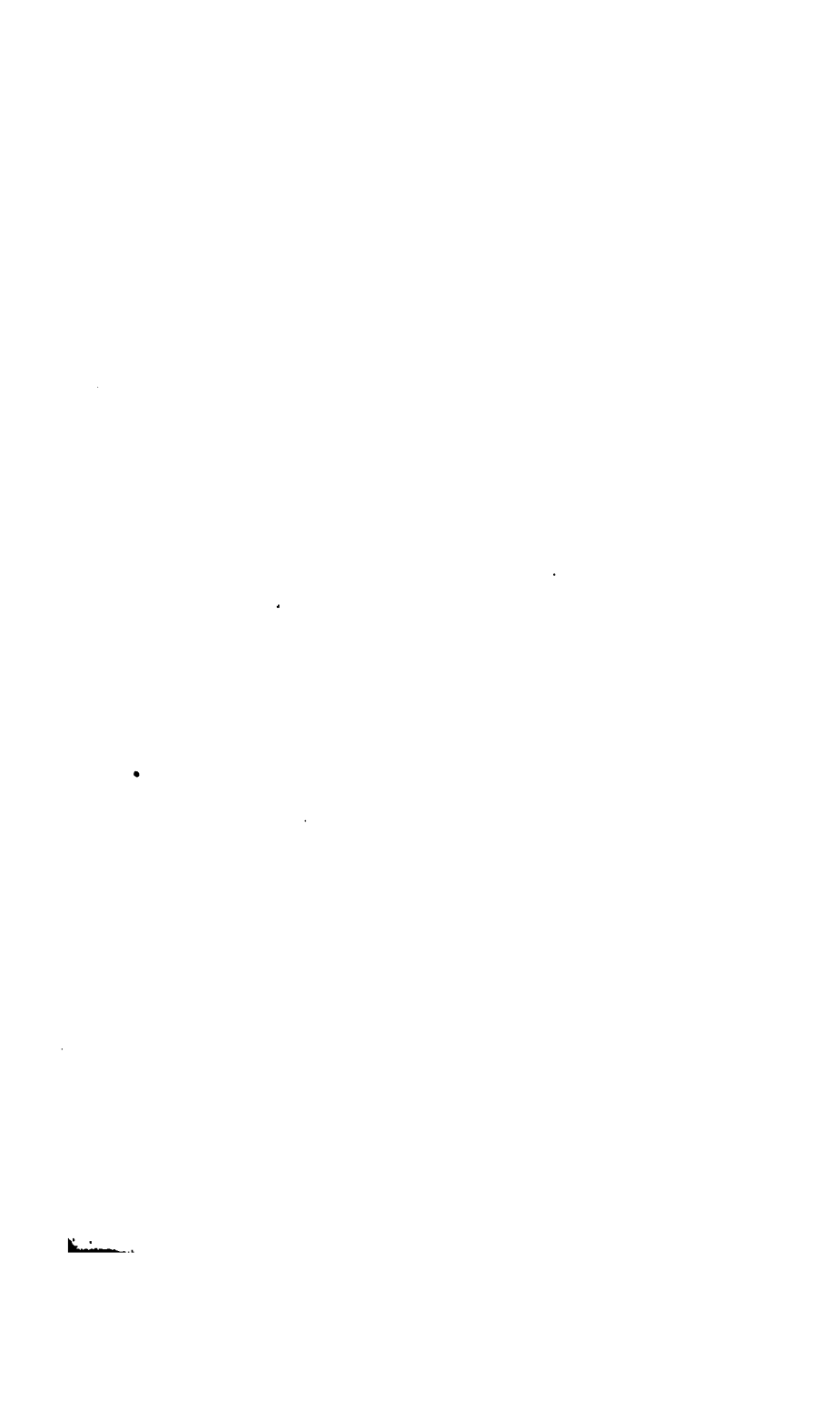
# BOOK V.

CASPIAN.

VOL. II.

B





## CHAPTER I.

### WHERE IS CASPIAN ?

MR. DALTON sat stooping forward over the fire—it was the dead mid-winter-time. Viola, with a paler and more thoughtful face than she used to have, was working by the light of the lamp, sitting close to the table, stitching new wristbands for her father's old shirts, and thinking of those she had stitched for Lionel, and of the immensely-long-ago-seeming time of that May evening, when she had knelt upon the floor of his room, packing his portmanteau, for their first parting after their engagement. She seemed able to recall so exactly how the vineleaf shadows had swung and swayed across the floor, how the evening mellowness of warm sweet light had brightened Lionel's hair and cheek, that it was more like seeing than remembering. She was so far living in that May-time, that her heart started a little when her father spoke, and recalled her to the lamp-lighted, close-curtained room, and to the

presence of the sad stooping figure by the winter fire, that, somehow, gave her more sense of loneliness than she felt when she was alone.

"I wonder, Viola," he said, musingly, "what has become of your cousin Caspian?"

Viola paused in her work as she answered, or echoed,


"I wonder."

It was some moments before her needle moved through the linen again.

"It is a long time now, my dear, isn't it, since we heard anything of her?"

"A very long time, papa."

This "wonder" just expressed by Mr. Dalton was, at this time, beginning to be echoed about among the different sets of people with whom Caspian had been in the habit of staying—to make herself useful on special occasions, either of festivity or of affliction. It was the occurrence of one of these special occasions that had originated the inquiry. As yet no one had answered the question that everyone was asking. For some time each of these sets of people of course believed that Caspian was with one of the others; and as they were not all known one to the other, this belief could last the longer. Her own family were the last to show any curiosity as to her whereabouts. When, on her being definitely required by one set of her



friends, the question, "Where is Caspian?" was passed about, it proved that she was not, nor had been for some time, at any one of her accustomed visiting-places, her father and brothers had no suggestion to offer beyond this—said by her father to the person who personally questioned him—

"She talked of getting some situation that would take her abroad for this winter. Doubtless she has succeeded. Caspian always does succeed in doing anything she wants to do."

Augusta and Julia Ryeman, discussing probabilities between themselves (Augusta was angry at Caspian's defection, as Caspian had promised to be with her, and to be "useful" to her, whenever the momentous time—already once postponed—for preparing her wedding wardrobe should arrive), Augusta said,

"*I* believe she has gone off after Lionel."

"That is one of the foolishhest of your foolish speeches! For heaven's sake never whisper such a sentence to anyone but me. Why, it is taking away the poor girl's character in a breath!"

"You goose! As if I should say it to any one but you! But I believe it. I'm sure Caspian has always been too fond of Lionel, and she got desperately in love with him when she was so much with him, while he was ill.'

"Caspian would never be desperate about anything or anybody. She will always be more in love with herself than with anyone else. That is her great safety," was Julia's answer.

"Of course I didn't mean anything improper. Lionel is devoted to that Miss Dalton, and Caspian knows that he is. I only mean that Caspian, who, you know, made no secret of her wish to travel and to live abroad, has probably got some situation that she knows will give her the chance of throwing herself in Lionel's way. I almost pity Miss Dalton, though she *was* too stuck-up to be friends with us."

"That was Lionel's fault."

"Well, I'm sorry for her; not, as you know, that I think much of Caspian, but I know that Lionel, though he said nothing except that it was his own decision, was vexed with Miss Dalton for choosing to stay with her father, instead of marrying at once and going with him. And if Caspian gets round him, wheedling and flattering, insinuating that had she been happy enough to be in Viola's place, then—you know her way."

"Oh! Augusta, she is not so bad as you, her friend, make her out."

"Dear me! do you call that bad?"

"I call it mean, treacherous, unwomanly—as bad as bad can be!"

"So do I. As to Caspian being my friend—well, I don't know."

"You certainly were fond of her."

"So I was, in a sort of a way, with always a something to get over afresh every time; but when one once begins to dislike and distrust her, then one travels very fast along that road, especially if she is not present. And you know, she never did like Miss Dalton."

"Though Miss Dalton seems always to have been most generously kind to her. Why, all Caspian's good dresses, and almost all her ornaments, were given her by Miss Dalton."

There was a pause; then Augusta said, blushing as she spoke,

"There is a reason you never knew of why Caspian and I were friends. You know, once, I went to stay with Caspian at Plaistown. Well I don't mind your knowing now it's all over, and perhaps it's safer to tell you the truth, lest someday you should hear something about it. Well, one of her brothers, Dick she calls him, made love to me while I was there. He's something like Caspian, but awfully handsome, and with something awfully fascinating about him, and so clever! I may be thankful I had no

fortune, or by this time I should be Mrs. Lock-year——”

“But you were already engaged to Harry, then!”

“I know that; but he had such a way with him, and, as I told you, he was so awfully handsome, and so clever, that he led you on before you knew where you were. Though I knew he was a desperate good-for-nothing, still, if he had asked me to marry him—— There, I don’t want to think about it. For the time I was——mad.”

“I don’t wonder you don’t want to think about it! I certainly don’t think Caspian’s influence has been good for you, Augusta,” Julia said gravely.

“I know it hasn’t. But I’m only just beginning to know how clever she is: how much influence she had. It was a terror to me to see them together the few times Caspian and Harry met; but if I’d understood Caspian as I now understand her, I shouldn’t have been able to bear the terror of it! I had always a feeling that, if I offended her, she would slip out something about my flirtation with her brother, and then you know what Harry is! But I used to be ashamed of feeling this, and think I was very unjust to poor devoted Caspian.”

“Wouldn’t it be much safer to tell him that

little episode yourself at once—not run the risk  
of his hearing it first from her ?”

“ You *don't* know what Harry is, I see !”

-



## CHAPTER II.

## A LETTER FROM CASPIAN.

AFTER a time, towards the spring, everybody knew both more and less than all about Caspian again. It was known that she had taken an engagement as travelling-companion to a rich elderly lady, with whom she was going "everywhere," the said lady having been seized with a restless mania, and a desire to see the world: not only that portion of it known to the ordinary British tourist, but it's less known nooks and corners.

Everybody said it was a very suitable thing. Caspian, with her knowledge of languages, and her practical ability, was entitled to set a high price on her services. No doubt she had done so, and this "was a very good thing for her, poor girl."

It was curious that nobody noticed that while they all (all her friends and acquaintance) thought they knew all about her, not one of them

knew where she was. That she was not in England was all that was known.

By-and-by there came to Viola a letter from Caspian. A letter on which she had *forgotten* to put either date or address. In it Caspian mentioned, in an incidental manner, assuming that of course Viola had already heard it from Lionel, that "strangest chance," which had only revealed itself to her just as the vessel in which they were was leaving Southampton, that she and her "former patient" Lionel were, actually, on board the same ship: bound, too, for the same port. She added, "I asked Lionel not to mention to anyone but you that he had seen me, as I have special reasons for not wishing my scamps of brothers to be able to track me."

The fact was that Caspian had especially pleaded with Lionel not to mention to Viola, above all people, that they had met—because her father and her brothers would be so likely to go to Orchardleigh with inquiries about her; and it would, she represented, be so much pleasanter for Viola not to know anything, than to know, and to have to refuse to say what she knew. Caspian, in the course of her letter, expressed great regret that she had, since they landed, at all events for a time, lost sight of Lionel, and spoke most gratefully of the kindness he had shown her.

“But, no doubt, our paths will cross each other again,” she went on; “I believe, indeed, it is ordained that they shall do so. Don’t think me hypocritical for using that word—it got written unawares; my companion, or rather the person to whom I am companion, is “pious,” and her phraseology is catching. It will be “so nice,” will it not? (to use, to counterbalance the levity of that other expression, the serious young-ladyism, at which we have so often laughed) “so nice” if I am able to see him occasionally, and to keep some sort of watch upon his health. Of course, since I nursed him through his illness of last summer, he looks upon me as a kind of grandmotherly Aunt; and for me to be able to report to you about him, in a way he wouldn’t report about himself, would be such a satisfaction and comfort to you, wouldn’t it, dear Viola? And, you see, dear Viola, the pleasure to me of doing this would be a double pleasure—pleasure in doing you a pleasure; pleasure in, perhaps, being of some use to dear Cousin Lionel. You know how much I always liked my cousin Lionel; and, of course, after watching by his sick bed, and nursing him back to health, I have now a sort of feeling of property in him, a very, very small and humble right in him, but still one that you, in your wealth and generosity,

the purple-clothed queen of his heart, may well be the first to recognize. I feel so sure you do and will recognize it, that I don't mind telling you, dear Viola, knowing there is no danger of making you jealous (jealous of poor me! how scornfully I see you smile!) what, at the time, caused poor me some serious annoyance. My prudish old maid of a "mistress" so far misconstrued Lionel's constant and affectionate kindnesses to me that she quarelled with me, about him, and I was placed in a most awkward position."

Then Caspian wandered off to other things.

This letter of hers left, as it was meant to leave, an unpleasant impression on Viola—an unpleasant taste in her mouth, as it were. It was strange that Lionel had not mentioned this "strangest chance;" this chance so strange, that even innocent Viola could not believe in its being, on Caspian's part, "chance" at all. Nor could it be "chance," on Lionel's part, that kept him silent about the matter, that prevented his naming Caspian's name in his letters.

Viola was grieved to find that Caspian's letter had power to leave a sting. She greatly blamed herself, as wronging Lionel, when she was conscious that it did so: and yet she couldn't quite dismiss the matter from her mind, but won-

dered over it. Wondered so much that, at times, she half inclined to think Caspian's letter lied as much in its text as in its spirit. In the first letter she wrote to Lionel after she had had Caspian's letter, Viola should, perhaps, have frankly asked, "How was it you didn't tell me that Caspian went out in the same vessel with you?" Perhaps Viola owed it to Lionel, to the perfect confidence and openness that had always been between them, to do this.

Caspian had calculated otherwise: she had calculated on the mingled pride, if pride it were, and delicacy, that would make Viola first hesitate to speak, and then remain silent.

Viola did not at once speak. She waited.

Then, when Lionel continued silent, she felt as if it became her to respect his silence: as if she ought, in perfect confidence, to accept his silence. Silence, for which, of course, he must have some good reason!

When many letters had passed between them, and the subject had never been touched, the feeling that her question would imply suspicion, would have in it something inquisitorial, which Lionel would be right to resent, had grown and strengthened.

She felt, too, as if she ought long ago to have dismissed the subject from her mind: as if

she ought to blush for herself, and for wrong done to Lionel, each time she found her thoughts hovering round it.

## CHAPTER III.

## WHY LIONEL WAS SILENT.

OF course there was no mystery implied by Lionel's silence, nor was it premeditated. He postponed speaking, just as Viola postponed questioning; and then, by-and-by, there seemed to grow some sort of awkwardness and constraint about the matter. It was not, even, only in deference to Caspian's entreaty that he was at first silent. It was in great part out of consideration for Viola. He would not have her the keeper of Caspian's secrets, or mixed up in any, the remotest, way with the affairs of the Lockyear family, even so far as to know Caspian's whereabouts.

Caspian had managed to make Lionel really believe that it was important to her future prospects that her family should not just now have any means of tracking her. They were going from bad to worse, she told him; her only chance of preserving an unblemished name—any respectability of character—was to sepa-

rate herself from them once and for ever. She hoped she had done this, she told Lionel; she hoped not to return to England. She would do or be, she said, anything rather than remain any longer in any way part or parcel of the squalid, disreputable household at Plaistown. To make the break as complete as possible—to cut herself off as perfectly as she was able—she had, as she said, left her name behind her; she had engaged herself to her present employer under the name of Lawson.

Lionel believed about half of what Caspian told him. He knew enough of the Lockyears, father and sons, to know that they could not be any protection to any girl, to believe in the probability that a girl so gifted as Caspian, with various sorts of ability, was a prey, a property, they would not willingly let escape. That Caspian was quite past contamination from relatives, who were disreputable, free-living, unprincipled, indeed, but not bad-hearted, Lionel could not know certainly. That Caspian—the quiet, well conducted, irreproachable Caspian—was the most dangerous among them—the cleverest, the most calculating, the least scrupulous, the coldest-hearted, he could not yet be sure. Perhaps there was by-and-by present the shadow of another reason, not so creditable to Lionel, helping to make him will-



ing to be silent to Viola as to the meeting with Caspian.

Lionel, perhaps, by-and by, felt that during the tedious days and weeks of a long voyage, he had sometimes been betrayed, by his own idleness and by Caspian's cunning, into something near enough flirtation with Caspian, to be remembered afterwards with annoyance by one new to any, even the most trivial, lapse from the high honour of single-minded devotion to one woman.

When Caspian first petitioned that her secret should be kept from Viola, Lionel had answered—"I have, and I will have, no secrets from Viola."

"Then all my efforts and sacrifices are vain. As I told you, Dick will be sure to go to Orchardleigh, and to Viola for news of me."

"Dick" was specially named by Caspian because she knew that of Dick, a handsome, dissolute reprobate, Lionel had a special horror.

"I don't believe your brother will have the audacity to make the attempt to see Viola."

"That was cleverly cruel," answered Caspian, grievedly.

"What was?"

"The emphasis laid upon 'your brother.' But my brother has audacity enough for anything; he has, too, winning ways of seeming reverence. Ask your step-sister Augusta if he

is easy to be resisted. Poor Augusta! Then Viola is not wise as the serpent, though she may be harmless as the dove."

They were pacing the deck together.

"Good night, Caspian," was all Lionel's comment, as he turned from her abruptly, feeling somewhat as Merlin felt after listening to Vivien. But Lionel's words, "I have, and I will have, no secrets from Viola," had furnished Caspian with a text for mocking raillery.

Caspian's "feelings" for Lionel were not at all of the kind to preclude her from taking malicious pleasure in paining and vexing him, if, by so doing, she advanced her own interests. She was, too, at times too far irritated by Lionel's coldness, blindness, pre-occupation, to be able to act exactly according to the dictates of her own wisdom.

It has not been said that Caspian *loved* Lionel. A hateful thing might love be if hers was love. There was none of that readiness in her (in which she was trying always to make him believe) to sacrifice herself for him. If she sacrificed herself, it would be for herself—for the gratification of her own passions; and to herself she was ready to sacrifice him also. She knew him happy in his love, and she set herself to poison his love, and so to spoil his

life. In what consisted that self-forgetful devotion to him, of which she was always striving to cherish his consciousness? To sit by him, to watch by him, to wait on him, to wake for him—all these things, on which she grounded her past claims, had brought their own reward—their draught of subtle, sweet poison. If she could have ministered to him unseen, unknown, in a way which could have given her no gratification (save that of his being served), and which would have laid upon him no burden of obligation, would she have cared so to minister? No, no, no. It was all selfish passion—not love, not love, not love! Indeed, there were times when Caspian almost hated Lionel, for his constancy, for his obduracy, for his simplicity, for his stupidity; but that hatred would stimulate, rather than cause any relaxation of, her purpose regarding him.

And in the present, on what did she ground her claims of being self-forgetfully devoted? For the gratification of being with him she was careless of how light talk might touch her reputation! He tried to be careful for her, and she made a boast (unspoken it is true, but still a boast) of her carelessness; she tried to make him understand, what she did not dare tell him, that, for his sake, all the world was indifferent to her, and she to all the world.

But then did she desire anything better than that he should know that because of him her reputation had been touched? Would she have hesitated to ground on this claims so enormous as involved the utter shipwreck of his life, and of the one life dearer than life? Instead of gloriously sacrificing herself for him, she was ready to lay upon him an undesired burden that, for him, must crush the light out of life!

If Caspian had possessed a little more tact, or if she had been able always to hold her temper in check, she would have been a more skilful adventuress. A little less passion, a little more patience, and she would have been more dangerous.

As it was, she tried to do too much, too quickly. She would pursue a subject, when to have dropped a few words, and been silent would have been the wiser way; her encounters with Lionel would seldom have ended in his anger and her discomfiture, had she been a little less in earnest—or a little better-tempered.

“As you have no secrets from Viola, of course you think she has none from you. Of course you mean her to have none from you,” asked Caspian, scoffingly, one day.

“She has none, she means to have none, she wishes to have none.”

“Your lordship is confident. Viola, for a wo-

man, is, I am ready to own, singularly simple and sincere—but she is a woman.”

“There are women and women ; which is as if one were to say there are angels and devils.”

“I deny that. All women are both, with sometimes one nature, sometimes the other in the ascendant, as the circumstances of their lives favour one or the other development.”

“That I deny. In no circumstances of life would some women (a very few, I grant you) be otherwise than very near the angelic standard in purity, in patience, and in truth ; while there are others in whom no imaginable circumstances would bring these virtues into light and action !”

“That is blasphemously false to womanhood,” cried Caspian, stung to the quick. “And for one who sets up to be its champion is a simply infamous speech !”

“I cannot see it so !”

“But it is so, it is so. I affirm that no woman has ever existed so bad that happiness in love would not bring her near the angels. No woman so good that misery and disappointment would not bring her to sin, to vice—to the devil.”

“But there are women, Caspian, not capable of love : women who don’t know what love is ; women who call ugly and unholy passions by its pure and sacred name.”

They went on with sharp speech, and sharper repartee—Caspian taking all Lionel said as meant in Viola's glorification and her own vilification, while Lionel had, at first, been utterly unconscious that she was doing so, till Caspian, slipping beyond her own control, said what was so open an attack on Viola, that Lionel, muttering the words,

"Low desire not to feel lowest makes them level all,"

turned away from her in unconcealed disgust. A moment after, however, he could not help looking at her almost deprecatingly, wondering if she had recognized his quotation, and if she remembered its context.

Her face told no story.

## CHAPTER IV.

## HOW IT ENDED.

FOR a few days after that Caspian allowed Lionel to avoid her; during those days she looked abjectly miserable; wretchedly ill: he noticed that she did not eat. Then one evening, as he stood on deck at dusk, he became aware that Caspian was beside him. She put her hand within his arm, detaining him.

"You must listen to me," she said. "You must forgive me! Your cold displeasure kills me! I have tried to feel myself insulted and to wait for you to seek me; but I know you will never do that. I am nothing to you; it makes no difference to you. If I jumped over the vessel's side now, as during the last few days I've felt tempted to do, you'd forget me almost as soon as the water had closed over me. I am nothing to you! And you to me——" She sobbed, "I know I say what I shouldn't say; but I get mad with misery sometimes—you are cold as ice, and hard as iron, and you crush me. If only you would be just ever so little kind to

me—to me who have no one to be kind to me, in all this world.”

“This is foolishly exaggerated talk, my dear girl. Much ado about nothing. There, you are forgiven, if there was anything to forgive. We seem to act as mutual irritants when we come together, therefore are best apart. Think no more about the matter. Go downstairs now. Good-night, good-night.”

But she was not so easily got rid of; she clung to his arm, imploring, in the most humble, reverent manner, a little patience, a little kindness, a little friendship, pleading her misery, her loneliness, as excuse for her bad temper. And he, remembering how she was changed from the calm, equable, always, apparently, content, and always obliging Caspian, to an irritable, vehement, unhappy girl, believed that she was miserable, thought she must be ill, and spoke to her softly and soothingly. He was her friend, he told her, and he tried to feel that this was true. He hoped she would look to him always as to a friend. He hoped he should never forget her past goodness to him.

“Goodness to you! Me good to you! Oh! Lionel!”

She clung to him, closer and closer, and was vehement in her expressions of gratitude, ecstatic in her declarations of happiness, almost start-



ling him into wishing to recall his simple words, since she seemed to attach to them some deep and mysterious significance. Yet he could not help being touched by such feminine feeling, such meek and humble gratitude for so small and common-place a concession. Her tears fell upon his hand, and the tone in which he begged her not to cry was almost tender. Wise Caspian, if she had parted from him then, leaving things as they were for that night; but she did not. The restless demon by which she was possessed would not suffer it to be so.

By-and-by, when they had some time paced to and fro, she always clinging to his arm, when, by degrees, she had allowed herself to calm down, when she had fallen somewhat into his tone of careless friendship, the tone into which she knew he wished her to fall, had even laughed a little at herself, and at the desperation of the past few days, saying,

"You see what strangely morbid creatures we women are; how repressed feelings grow and grow till they come to be something to be afraid of and ashamed of, and we are

' . . . as one who hid a giant's child

In her deep prison, and, from year to year,

He grew to his own stature, fierce and wild,

And what she took for love she kept for fear.' "

When there seemed to be between them a

quite friendly, and brotherly and sisterly sort of freedom, Caspian began—

“It is so strange how often I, who love you so well, offend you so much, dear Cousin Lionel! It must be because I am over-anxious not to do so, and so say the wrong thing always, through nervous awkwardness. It never, for a moment, occurred to me, the other day, till I saw how angry you were, that you could think I meant to imply that any secrets dear Viola might have from you would not be always of the most innocent nature. I never dreamt of any more serious concealments, for instance, than that she would not always, perhaps, tell you of every visit paid to Orchardleigh by that good, kind, handsome Mr. Newnham—nor of every little attention paid by him to her in your absence. Nor do I think she would be either wise or kind to do so, it might make you uncomfortable for nothing, for of course there could be nothing in it—Viola being the good true girl she is, and loving you as, in her sweet girlish way, she doubtless does.”

Lionel had no time to speak the comment on his lips. Caspian went on, in the steady, pauseless way she had, when she wanted to get an offensive thing said in a manner that should make it, at the time, seem quite inoffensive, a mere matter-of-fact statement.

“Of course, it is so natural that Mr. Newnham

should be a great deal at Orchardleigh, considering how kind-hearted he is, and how fond of him that poor foolish old father of Viola's is. If it were not for Mr. Newnham, surely poor Viola must die of ennui. Of course poor old Mr. Dalton will encourage his visits, and of course Viola will feel very grateful to him for his kindness to her father, and a little grateful to him on her own account. But of course there can be no harm in this. There is something very winning in Mr. Newnham's manner, something both sweet and penetrating in his eyes; and his treatment of Viola, in its homageful chivalry, is perfect. Don't you think so? And don't you see that it would be both unkind and foolish of Viola to let Mr. Newnham, his kindness and his attentions, play as great a part in her letters to you, as they can't help doing in her life, poor girl? It is not as if dear Viola——"

But Lionel could stand no more. What it was exactly that he said to Caspian he did not himself know afterwards. Caspian told him that he gave her to understand that Viola's name was, he considered, profaned by her lips. But there was anger between them again, and mutual avoidance for days.

At the end of those days Caspian made such a confession as appealed to Lionel's magnanimity; possibly, also, a little to his vanity. She accused

herself of jealousy, of her whose name her lips, he had told her, were unfit to pronounce—a true accusation—and of all things evil besides, except such as she was guilty of. She

“ Would have wrought upon his cloudy mood  
With reverent eyes mock-loyal, shaken voice,  
And flutter'd adoration, and, at last,  
With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more  
Than who should prize him most.”

Somehow, this time, she managed him so perfectly, that when he should have been roused from anger to anger, he was overcome by pity.

So things went on ; a to-and-fro of anger, and of some sort of reconciliation, to which Caspian strove to give as much as possible of the colouring of lovers' quarrels and reconciliations. And Lionel, while he believed that he wearily desired the end of the voyage, and to see the last of Caspian, would have missed the excitement of these encounters had they ended before the voyage. Then, just before the vessel reached port, matters complicated themselves in a most unpleasant way.


A violent quarrel arose between Caspian and her employer ; the only ground of which, Caspian made Lionel believe, was Lionel's conduct towards Caspian, the way the two had “ gone on ” during the voyage. Caspian's explanations did not appease the old lady (possibly she did

not wish them to do so.) Caspian was discharged.

When the vessel arrived in port, therefore, Caspian, but for Lionel, was utterly alone and unprotected. She had made no friends among the few other lady-passengers, she was not, in fact she had not tried to be, in good odour among them. She had no letters of introduction to anyone in the island. She had no money—at least, so she let Lionel believe—but that of the few months' salary paid to her grudgingly by her enraged patroness.

This was a position of real distress, that appealed to Lionel's sympathies. To Caspian the situation was delightful. She hugged herself in a kind of triumphant ecstasy; it was with the greatest difficulty that she could affect a proper show of misery and desolation, of timidity and consciousness, as she found herself entirely dependant upon Lionel for advice and assistance and protection.

To Lionel the situation was one of extreme difficulty and annoyance; but he did his best to hide the annoyance. She listened to his counsels with the meekest docility, and accepted his assistance with most humble gratitude. He could not but be astonished at her want of all practical ability, at her utter helplessness in his hands; but then he could not help being flat-



tered by her utter reliance upon his wisdom and knowledge, as well as being touched by the real distressful isolation of her position.

Poor Lionel—he was no match for the cunning, unscrupulously selfish, and sensually passionate, and yet, to a great extent, calculating and self-controlled woman who had fastened herself upon him, intent on his destruction.

Before he was free of her—having, through the aid of people to whom he had letters of introduction, obtained her a situation, which, though it was not to her taste, she was obliged to accept, as, when she made demur, she saw signs of distrustful impatience about Lionel—Caspian, unfortunately, had been so far successful, that there had been passages of flirtation between them; on his side, half disdainful, half-defensive; on hers earnest, vehement, tempestuous—passages that he would shrink to have read by the sweet eyes of his Viola.

Lionel hardly knew, indeed, perhaps, it would have wounded his vanity though it might have relieved his conscience, to know, how completely he had been the victim, how very small was his blame, how he had, step by step, been forced on. It exasperated him to remember that there had been anything but serious straightforward relations between himself—whose whole heart and life were Viola's—and a woman whom circum-

stances had, he thought, thrown so completely helpless upon his protection.

When he looked back upon the past, after he and Caspian had parted, it was a mystery to him how such things had come to be.

He promised himself some day to make a full confession to Viola, of all that had passed between himself and Caspian ; meanwhile he hoped he had done with Caspian. The place in which he left her was not that of his own ultimate destination. If she had known how purely the sigh, to which she gave an interpretation of regretful sentiment, was one of intense relief, Caspian might, even now, have despaired. She did not know it, and she parted from him full of hope.

It was not so easy to have done with Caspian. Even while he hoped, earnestly and sincerely, that he had done with her, the memory of her as he had last seen her, when

“ So tender was her voice, so fair her face ;  
So sweetly gleam'd her eyes behind her tears,  
Like sunlight on the plain behind a shower,”

that he had “ half believed her true ”—that is to say, had half believed her to be what she was assuming to be—an unhappy girl—the victim of a hopeless passion—resigned to know it hopeless, and only hopeful of the happiness of the beloved—haunted him.

She had dared to say, "If only I thought Viola more capable of loving as you should be loved!" But it had been said in the moment of parting, and with such a choking agony of tears, as had made resentment of the treason at the time impossible. And now he hoped he had done with Caspian.





# BOOK VI.

A BLIGHTED SPRING.



## CHAPTER I.

## A BLIGHTED SPRING.

THIS first spring of Lionel's absence was an unthriving, cheerless spring, with a May as bitter and bleak and black as the hardest March. All blossoms came late, and with niggardly sparseness.

Poor Viola felt an appropriateness in this, and yet it was one more, though an unrecognized, source of depression—and, at this time, the circumstances of her life were all depressing.

Mr. Dalton did not like that Viola should be out of his sight and reach; he said nothing, he was always patient, but his eyes followed her with a pathetic wistfulness whenever she moved to leave the room in which he was, and welcomed her back with a too eloquent gladness when she returned. He was not in any other way exacting, if, indeed, this could be called exacting; he liked Viola to read her own books, to play, to sing, to write, to work, as she felt disposed—he only cared that she should be in

sight, in reach. He did not care to be read to. "It wearies me to listen, my dear," he would say, after a few minutes, when she attempted it.

"Don't trouble to try and amuse me," he would say if she proposed any game. "I am quite content. I like to sit quiet. I am quite content."

It was difficult for anyone to realize, except by experience, the wear and tear to heart and brain of this continual sad, gentle, unvarying presence.

Viola at first tried still to study those things that Lionel most cared that she should know; but she found the effort too great a strain upon her: the consciousness of her father's sad eyes always upon her seemed to paralyze her mind. The only luxury of loneliness that she allowed herself in the daytime was the time she spent in writing to Lionel—those long, loving, faithful, fervent letters, which always left him, when he finished them, more hopeful and more earnest-minded than they found him.

To some of Viola's questionings Lionel did not find it easy to reply. She asked him, for instance, how he had progressed with the work he had planned to do on the voyage. He had to remember that Caspian had teased and piqued and flattered him into a contemptible and enervating frittering away of his time. After read-

ing one of Viola's letters, the recollection of his intercourse with Caspian was always specially distasteful to him. He still intended some day to tell Viola all about it, but he still postponed the carrying out of his intention.

Mr. Newnham was, as Caspian had predicted, a good deal at Orchardleigh; not so much at first, but by degrees it grew to be, more and more a habit with him to come—with them to look for him.

He was the only person Mr. Dalton found pleasure in seeing; when Mr. Newnham was there he roused himself to something like animation. The question of Mr. Newnham's standing for the county was the one question in which he showed an almost excited interest. Mr. Newnham was, therefore, the one person who sometimes relieved Viola of the gentle burden of her life.

Viola said to him, with her sweet safe sincerity, when she found how habitual his visits were becoming—


“I know I may trust to you not to misunderstand my so constantly absenting myself from the room when you are here. I can leave papa so little at other times. It does me good to be sometimes alone, and papa is so happy with you. I write parts of my long journal-letters to Lionel when you are with papa, for I feel at ease about him then.”

"You treat me with the truest friendliness, most as I would have you treat me, when you make me of any use to you," was the sincere answer to her sincere speech, though it was in the nature of things impossible that there should not be a momentary bitter pain felt by Mr. Newnham in recognizing of how negative and humble a use he could alone be.


Viola let Rosie stay on at school, because she thought that the atmosphere of Orchardleigh must be depressing to so young a girl, and that of school, therefore, healthier for her. The "school" Rosie was at being a happy country home, where she had sensible and sweet supervision, and two or three carefully-chosen little friends.

During the winter holidays Viola had exerted herself to make the house bright. Rosie's favourite little friend came home with Rosie. The children had long rides on Brown Bess and the old pony, sometimes taken care of by old John, sometimes by kind Mr. Newnham. They had a glad merry time of it, and knew nothing of the quiet monotony of gloom that settled down again when they had left.

The days of Brown Bess were numbered, or, rather, her days in the stables of Orchardleigh. The question of finance began to perplex Viola. The expenses of the household were very small



now. Mrs. Dalton had been the one person in it who cared for costly ornament, for luxurious living, for outside show. Yet, small as were her present expenses, Viola sometimes found it difficult to get from her father money enough to defray them. The subject of money seemed to pain and perplex and irritate him; he talked of claims impending for which he must be prepared. When Viola begged him to let her write to his lawyer and ask him to look into, and to arrange their affairs, he became painfully excited, and she was obliged to leave the subject alone, and to go on, from week to week, as best she could. He said that if for a few months things went safely, then all would be right. Viola knew that he had lost money by unfortunate investments, that he was involved to some extent in the affairs of a company of which he had been the only honest and straightforward member. She knew that pecuniary anxieties had helped to break down his health, but she knew all these things very vaguely, and as it did not do to speak to her father about them, and there was none else to whom she could speak, she was obliged to let things alone, and go on in the dark, practising, in all her expenditure, the strictest economy. Parting with one of her servants just now, she did not engage another in her place, and she proposed to her





father the sale of Brown Bess. "She is never used now. I have got out of the habit of riding. We will keep Rosie's pony and old John's cob; they don't cost much, because they can be chiefly turned out, but the mare is dainty and delicate. It is a pity to keep her, pretty creature, and never use her, if we can find a good home for her, and I suppose she is not yet too old to fetch a good price."


Constant occupation, and the difficulty of leaving her father, were not Viola's only reasons for not riding now. Loyalty to Lionel was another reason. Had she ridden it could hardly have been helped that Mr. Newnham would have been her frequent companion, and she felt she would not, in Lionel's absence, like to be riding with anyone else through the deep lanes, across the happy meadows, over the breezy commons, where she had so often ridden with him.

It was settled that Brown Bess should be sold. Old John and Mr. Newnham arranged the sale between them. A happy home was secured for her, and a price paid for her that would carry Viola through several months of her careful house-keeping. It cost Viola something to part with her. One bleak afternoon, while Mr. Newnham was sitting with her father, Viola went to the stables to bid Brown Bess good-bye. As she stood by the pretty gentle creature, stroking its

glossy neck, and talking to it, memory after memory crowded upon her, till she dropped her forehead against its head and sobbed. To say good-bye to Brown Bess was like saying good-bye afresh to her sunny girlhood, to the happy spring-time of her love, to all the careless freedom of youth. But Viola could not afford to cry long. When she cleared her eyes of tears, and looked up, she was struck by the curious appropriateness to her mood of the scene she looked upon.

It was getting late in the spring, and yet the orchards were almost without blossom. Just opposite where she stood was the grand old, blighted, lightning-blasted pear-tree, a special favourite of hers, of which she had made many a sketch and study. It now lifted up, against a leaden sky, heavily threatening, full of coldly-lurid gloom, a few scanty patches of snow-white blossom. A pallid light enhanced the whiteness of this snow, and brought out, with a sort of livid distinctness, the hoary, rhinoceros-like bark of the split trunk.

The picture pleased Viola ; she made mental notes of it. She would describe it to Lionel, as an emblem of what spring felt like to her in his absence. And then came memories of that other spring—that spring of golden-houred, glad days—that blossom-time of blossom-times,



in which the conscious life of their love began. She remembered what the orchard had looked like then—what the world had felt like then. She recalled the dawns she had watched when her happiness woke her early; how she had seen the greyish white of pear-blossom-bud-covered trees grow rosy white with the first sunbeams upon them, to change before noon to the broad white dazzling brilliance of worlds of fully-opened blossom; to stand white and wide through the afternoon hours, to mellow and glow in the sunset, to bleach, and blanch, and shimmer, and shine in the moonlight. She remembered that year's blossom-time of the great wild cherry-tree at the bend of the stream, close to the old oak, at the foot of the south-sloping meadow—the enchanted world of light-haunting fairy flutters of opal-tinted blossoms, that had been for her and for Lionel under the bee-murmurous, sunshiny boughs; she could even recall its wide-flung, almond-flavoured, honey-like fragrance. She remembered, too, that miracle of prodigal and most delicate beauty, the wild apple-tree, laden with its rose wealth, brightening the waste place with a brightness no rose-garden of south or east could equal, come upon by chance on that happy ride. She remembered the beech-woods of that spring—remembered——

.

But here, poor girl, she drooped again against Brown Bess, and cried—

“Oh! Lionel—oh! Lionel, come back to me! How could you leave me?—how could I let you go? Oh! Lionel, come back to me!”

At that moment all seemed foolishness but love—all ambition vain and empty; to have kept together, if even it were but to starve together, seemed the wiser way. Only for a moment. Then came proud thoughts of Lionel: he was a man, and it was right he should have a man's ambitions; he was a man to be a power in the world—to play a great part in the world.

“But will those times—such happy times—times like those happy times—*ever* come back?” she thought. “I knew they were happy times, but how happy it seems as if I had never known till now.”

A cold chill crept through her. Again her eyes rested upon the blasted tree, whose patches of blossom were more suggestive of the scanty locks of hoary age than of the young year's happy flowering-time. Again that cold chill crept through her; she did not dare stay out in the bleak darkening afternoon longer—darkening, though there were hours of daylight yet, as if for snow, and hail, and sleet. She could not afford to be ill.

“Mr. Newnham, who has bought Brown Bess? I should like to know, and John can’t tell me.” It was not that day she questioned thus, but later, when Brown Bess had been gone some weeks.

Viola had no sooner spoken, and looked at Mr. Newnham, which she did not do till she had finished speaking, than the colour that rose to Mr. Newnham’s face reflected itself in Viola’s.

Mr. Newnham was afflicted with a habit of blushing—of blushing red all over his face like a bashful school-boy—and this was no light affliction; it made a nervous man more nervous. He would willingly have paid many thousands, and forfeited much of his stalwart, wholesome handsomeness, for a good brown undemonstrative complexion, or one of unvarying, “interesting” pallor.

“I beg your pardon. Possibly I ought not to have asked the question,” Viola said, proudly. She was annoyed with herself, a little, also, with Mr. Newnham, and yet could hardly tell why.

“Such a very natural question—and, indeed, I am happy you should know,” Mr. Newnham answered, soon recovering himself.

“I bought her. I wanted her,” he hastened to add. “I am expecting a little invalid cousin of mine to pay me a visit at Newnham, with her

mother, and I'm going to teach her to ride."

"Brown Bess will be too spirited for an invalid child to learn upon. There is no mischief about her, but she is full of frolic."

"Perhaps we shall begin with a quiet pony," he replied, again slightly embarrassed. "Brown Bess will at any rate remain with me for the present, even when my cousin leaves: my cousin has no settled home just now. So, if, at any time, you will give your pretty favourite the pleasant privilege of carrying her own mistress, you know she will be always at hand, and at your service."

He had managed to get it out—and then he blushed again as Viola looked quietly, a little sternly, perhaps, into his eyes.

"I don't exactly know whether to thank you for having bought my pet," Viola said. "You know, Mr. Newnham, I always expect to be able to believe what you tell me. But it doesn't seem to me that Brown Bess will be of any use to your cousin."

There the subject dropped. Mr. Newnham looked rather dejected, and soon after took his leave; and then Viola felt as if she had been sourly ungracious; and yet, she felt, too, somehow, that she had a right, for Lionel's sake, not to be quite pleased; and she thought that Mr. Newnham's embarrassment showed that he knew

she had that right. And it was painful to her to remember how high a price had been paid to her for her favourite. And, altogether, the transaction left an unpleasant impression. Two things she firmly resolved—that she would not re-mount Brown Bess, and that she would write to Lionel an account of the whole affair.

“There, now, I’ve displeased her,” Mr. Newnham thought of himself, as he rode homewards. “If I hadn’t been such a bashful fool—if I could have spoken, and looked as if it was nothing but the most ordinary business transaction, she’d never have thought again about it! It’s a thousand pities I can’t make an exchange of complexion with some one of the many unblushing young women of this century. We should both be the gainers!”

## CHAPTER II.

## “MY LITTLE COUSIN.”

THE “little cousin” was not the mere child Viola, from Mr. Newnham’s way of speaking of her, had expected ; nor that Mr. Newnham himself considered her.

Alma was, probably, two or three years younger than Viola. She was very small and fairy-like, or, perhaps, rather elf-like in form. She impressed Viola, though she could hardly have told why, as a creature born with no possibilities for any but the most transient existence ; a creature, too, who, like a quick-burning lamp, was as rapidly as possible consuming what vital power it had.

Her small face, with its transparent delicacy of complexion, and its eyes—gloriously large dark expressive, but unnaturally bright, with a painful restless-burning brightness—and its small, too red-lipped mouth, furnished with tiny pearly teeth, that looked only fit to meet in fairy-food,—appeared all the smaller and whiter from the




heavy wealth of loose-hanging dark hair out of which it shone.

One hesitated to call Alma beautiful or lovely; such beauty as she had seemed to be neither of the heavens, nor the earth, to be immaterial without being spiritual.

In spite of signs to the contrary, anyone of which might have been sufficiently convincing, Alma's mother, Mrs. Falkner Newnham, insisted that there was nothing seriously amiss with the child—nothing that, under favourable circumstances, would not be shaken off. To secure these favourable circumstances, Mrs. Falkner Newnham had proposed a long visit to her nephew's house.

That Alma's father, and all her sisters and brothers, had died of decline, was nothing in the eyes of Mrs. Falkner Newnham, as affecting the question of Alma's health. Mrs. Falkner Newnham had "views" with regard to Alma, and she would not contemplate the possibility that the child might die till she had fulfilled her part.

Mr. Newnham drove his guests over to Orchardleigh on a very early day after their arrival at Newnham; and Viola was not long in discovering two facts concerning them—that Alma worshipped her "kind cousin," as her mother always called him; and that Mrs. Falkner Newnham, a worldly woman of the world, handsome,



and still young to look at, from a little distance, or when her veil was down, was very anxious to relinquish the charge of her invalid daughter into the hands of a rich husband, and encouraged this worshipful disposition of her child's.

Viola, feeling as she did just now, old and experienced, could not know Alma without thinking, sometimes, as she recognised the excessive delicacy expressed by both face and form, that in that delicacy was the best promise or safeguard against more than ordinary misery. She would not live to suffer and to struggle: the first touch of frost, or the first too fervid sun-scorch, would kill so frail a plant.

She soon felt a kind of motherly tenderness towards the geniusy, sensitive, passionate, uncontrolled little creature, to whom, she was soon sure, all real motherly tenderness was unknown. And Alma attached herself warmly to Viola, treating her in a manner that contrasted strongly with the half-defiant hostile air that at first, only at first, characterized the mother's manner towards her. Indeed, it was partly to this hostility of Mrs. Newnham's that Viola owed Alma's devotion.

Mr. Newnham's self-invited guests seemed likely to prolong their stay at Newnham indefinitely. In fact, Mrs. Falkner Newnham could see no possible reason why Newnham should

not, for the present, at all events, be their permanent residence. First of all, soon after their arrival, Alma, who had caught cold through travelling on a bitter June evening (there were many bitter evenings in that year's June), was seriously ill. Then, as she got better, Mrs. Falkner Newnham discovered that Newnham air was working wonders for "her darling." She believed, she said, that if Alma could live always in an air so admirably adapted to the peculiarities of her constitution, she would be a perfectly healthy woman—not exactly robust, perhaps, probably requiring all the luxurious comforts which wealth alone can supply, but still perfectly healthy. Then Mrs. Falkner Newnham would sigh and remark that it was a very sad thing to be poor, when one had such a charge as Alma laid in one's hand. And when she remarked this Viola could not help noting the richness of the lady's dress, the costliness of her ornaments—and wondering.

Alma *would* be always going to Orchardleigh; and after a time her mother, finding that Viola was a power in the neighbourhood, and having heard, too, that she was an "engaged" young lady, withdrew all opposition to this intimacy, and never seemed to weary of expressing her admiration for that "lovely and sweet Miss Dalton."

Alma, on a pretty Shetland pony, her stal-

wart handsome cousin holding the leading-rein, made a very pretty picture. Her riding-dress, the soft grey habit, and plumed hat, the plume mingling with her lovely dark curls, became her, as did the exercise and her happiness, poor child ! Her visits to Orchardleigh were of almost daily occurrence. Mr. Dalton found pleasure in looking at her, in talking to her. She "took to" him. As to her riding Brown Bess, there was no question of it, and didn't seem likely ever to be, for Alma was extremely timid and very weak. In truth, Mr. Newnham intended that Brown Bess should never carry any one if not her former mistress.

But Viola, smiling down on them from the vine-clad oriel of the drawing-room, one morning when something like summer was smiling over the world at last, not long before summertime would be over (they had not dismounted this morning, but had just called in passing to leave some fruit for Mr. Dalton), and seeing that Alma's pony this morning was entrusted entirely to Alma's management, said,

"I suppose, Mr. Newnham, you will soon let her try Brown Bess?"

"Not just yet," Mr. Newnham answered ; and then he turned to speak to Alma, and Alma lifted up her face, cream-colour with carnation tinges on each cheek, that came and went al-

most with every pulse; and shook back her dark curls, and said to Viola,

"Oh, I *wish*, I *do* wish you would!"

"Would what, Alma?"

"Ride with us sometimes. Oh, do! Vincent told me to ask you. Mr. Dalton, you can make her."

"I wish she would," Mr. Dalton said. "It would do her a world of good."

"If you are here in the winter, when Rosie is home, she will be so pleased to go with you!" Viola answered, not even entertaining the question of going herself.

"Rosie is only a child," pouted Alma. "I don't care for children."

As Viola's eyes fixed themselves dreamily, half-longingly upon the breezy hills, Mr. Newnham's were contemplating her. She looked pale and languid this splendid morning, he thought. She did not look strong enough to bear up against the heavy pressure on her shoulder, which alone enabled Mr. Dalton to stand.

"Let us call for you to-morrow," he urged. "Don't refuse us. Just this once. I know it would be such a pleasure to your father to see you mounted once more. And, as he says, the fresh air would do you a world of good. She needs it, indeed, Mr. Dalton."

"Oh, no, I do not! You should not say so. I am very well," Viola answered hastily.

Then Viola's eyes accidentally fell upon Alma's face, which, as she watched her cousin, as he gazed at Viola, had changed and darkened.

"I really doubt if it would do me any good," Viola went on. "I have not ridden for so long. I should be over-tired. It is very kind of you both, but indeed I would rather not."

"I won't give up the hope," Mr. Newnham said. "I shall have your mare gently exercised, and shall bring her round with me to-morrow, for old John to dress her with your own saddle."

"I beg you won't take the trouble—indeed, I shall not go. I don't mean to ride till I ride again with Lionel."

Alma did not hear Viola's last words. She had first averted her face, so that it was entirely hidden by her hair, and the long plume of her hat; then she wheeled her pony round and rode off, without looking up again, without any farewell greeting to Viola or Mr. Dalton. Mr. Newnham, lifting his hat, rode after her, looking much astonished. He had at first been alarmed, thinking that the movement was owing to some wilfulness of the Shetland's. Viola saw him stooping down and bending forward, trying to look into the averted face.

"Alma, you didn't wish Mr. and Miss Dalton good morning," was what he was saying. "What was the reason of that?"

"Poor little soul!" Viola thought to herself. "You are jealous, but we can soon cure that." Then Viola remembered that to know that Viola's love was given elsewhere would not suffice to cure such jealousy as Alma's.

Though Viola had no thought of riding to-morrow, there had risen in her, as she looked towards the breezy hills, a longing to ride. Not just a gentle exercise, with a careful escort and that fairy-companion, but a wild, reckless, random ride across country, a complete breaking through of the orderly jog-trot monotony of her life. Viola was haunted; she thought such a ride as she longed for would banish her haunting thoughts, would help her to get out of the gloomy atmosphere that hemmed her in; but she never dreamt of indulging her longing. The next morning it rained, steady, soft, persistent rain.

"I'm not sorry, papa," Viola answered at breakfast-time, to her father's regrets. "I didn't mean to go, and this saves the trouble of refusing. I have a feeling against riding with anyone but Lionel—unless it could be you, papa, or old John. And that isn't all. Now that

Brown Bess has been bought by Mr. Newnham, I shouldn't choose to use her !”

“But you were tempted yesterday.”

“The old free wandering spirit woke in me. I was tempted to long to ride, but not with them. This morning I am glad it rains.”

There was a pause ; then Mr. Dalton said,

“Surely, Viola,”—there was a trembling sternness in his weak voice—“it is long since you have heard from Lionel.”

“It is rather longer than usual, papa.”

Viola rose abruptly, when she had answered that, and left the room, to avoid further questioning. When she came back, however,—she had been away half an hour, perhaps, had ordered the dinner, and attended to various small domestic matters,—Mr. Dalton said,

“How much longer than usual, Viola ?”

“Twice as long, perhaps, papa.”

“You have been fretting.”

“No, papa, not that, but of course I am anxious, lest he should be ill.”

“If he were ill surely he would have the consideration to get a friend to write for him.”

Viola looked wonderingly at her father. Then she flushed hotly, as she said,

“Papa, somebody has been putting something against Lionel into your mind ! If he had been



two hundred times longer than usual in writing, do you think I would hear any blame hinted against him? Who can have been hinting blame against him to you? Surely not Mr. Newnham?"

"My daughter, you wrong a man than whom I have never known one more magnanimously honourable!"

"However good I believe Mr Newnham to be, papa, it is, of course, a million times easier to me to suspect him of wrong than to hear even a tone that blames Lionel. And that a blaming tone should be used by you, papa—that you should be ready, on such slight, slight cause, to blame him——" She did not end that sentence, but, instead, began another. "It would be quite as easy to me, papa, to suspect myself of want of truth and loyalty towards Lionel, as to suspect Lionel of want of them towards me."

"Men are exposed to temptations that do not touch women—of which women know nothing. Men get entangled through their passions, their weaknesses, even, sometimes, through their good qualities, in a way of which women can conceive nothing. I merely say this in self-defence, that you may not think I meant any monstrosity of injustice against Lionel!"

Viola looked a few moments into her father's face, with a variety of emotions flitting over

her own, till, overcome by the pathetic distress at having distressed her which she saw there, at the sort of shrinking from her anger, she stooped and kissed his hand; and then no more was said. But a wonder remained in Viola's heart, as to whether her father had not meant more than he said—as to whether some flying report had not from some quarter reached him. She was very glad she had not told her father anything about that letter she had, some months ago now, received from Caspian Lockyear.

## CHAPTER III.

## A RETREAT.

THE sad, pale summer, that had followed the cold, unthriving spring, and had only, for a few of its last weeks, asserted itself as summer, was past now. Rosie had not come home for her holidays this summer. She had gone to Switzerland with the family of her little friend, so there had not been, even, the break of her bright presence. A rainy autumn set in—an autumn of persistent, day-after-day rain. For some weeks there was very little intercourse between Newnham and Orchardleigh. Then, one evening, in spite of rain, Mr. Newnham came over.

“It’s quite refreshing to see you,” was Mr. Dalton’s greeting—“wind and rain and bad weather seem only to make you look the fresher and stronger.” That was said while the first glow of exercise in which Mr. Newnham entered lasted; afterwards, Viola did not think him looking as well as usual; she thought he looked tired and worried.

Viola herself was happy that day. She had had a letter from Lionel that was like a letter from Lionel—a letter out of which she had been able to read bits to her father that had pleased her father, so that they had talked of Lionel cordially and harmoniously.

“I find I must leave home, and for a somewhat indefinite period,” Mr. Newnham announced abruptly, soon after he came in.

“Indeed! No trouble of any kind, I hope, is the cause?” Mr. Dalton said.

With a nervous laugh, a little hesitation, and not without the penalty of a deep blush, Mr. Newnham answered—

“To such dear friends it is, for all reasons, best, I think, to own the truth. I laugh, but it is no laughing matter. The fact is, Mrs. Falkner Newnham is putting me to the rout; my departure is a retreat, if not a case of running away. I leave the field to the enemy.”

“Does the widow insist upon marrying you?” Mr. Dalton asked.

“To her daughter. She tried for herself some years ago; she has for years been violently enamoured of Newnham. Not succeeding for herself, she is now trying for poor little Alma. As I cannot send my visitors away, my only resource is to go away myself. Don’t laugh at me, Miss Dalton. I know my position

is a ludicrous one, but don't laugh at me."

"Indeed—indeed, Mr. Newnham, I have no inclination to laugh. I had hoped——" She paused here, feeling she had no right to say more; but Mr. Newnham looking at her expectantly, waiting for her to speak, she added—"I could not help seeing—it can be no treason to her to say this, for she shows it in the most bewitchingly simple and child-like manner—that your pretty little guest was very fond of you. I mean, more than that."

"Miss Dalton, I do hope you are not going to complicate matters; fond of me, of course, I know the dear child is—always has been; but for the rest, I hoped it all existed only in the wishes of the old campaigner, as I must take the liberty of designating my respected aunt-in-law. If you think differently, why, then——"

Mr. Newnham did not finish his sentence. Viola was silent; she was regretting that she had spoken, but Mr. Newnham would have her speak further.

"You have not yet finished something you began to say." He spoke deferentially. "You said you had hoped——"

Driven to speak, she did so with grave directness—

"I could not help seeing how it was with Alma. I hoped you saw it, too—I hoped that

you might find your happiness in giving love for love. We have authority for saying,

‘Love sought is good, but given unsought is better.’

In this case it is given with such artless simplicity, and with such innocent abandon, that if, in any case, that saying holds, it surely holds in this.”

Then, feeling a little nervous at having said so much on such a subject, Viola went on to talk of Alma, saying what a marvel it seemed that such a mother should have a daughter of such unspoiled simplicity, saying that it surely proved a very strong inherent purity and truth of temperament in Alma to have been able to remain so unspoiled.

“Alma seems to me irresistibly fascinating,” she finished by saying.

“She is too much of the elf, the sprite, the genius, the fairy—too little the woman. In a woman I value——”

Here Mr. Newnham paused, and, poor fellow, blushed, afraid to speak further, lest he should draw too manifest a portrait of Viola herself. There was an awkward silence.

“So you fly from the enemy,” Mr. Dalton broke it by remarking. “Well, when it is a woman who is in arms against us, discretion is, indeed, the better part of valour.”

Mr. Dalton spoke feelingly, remembering the mistake of his life—his second marriage.

“Yes, I fly, but I feel angry at having to fly, and at leaving the enemy in possession. If that woman would only have left my little cousin alone, I believe she would have loved me very happily as her cousin and playfellow through all the few years of her life; but that doesn’t suit Mrs. Falkner, and it is, ‘my poor child,’ ‘my suffering darling,’ and significant looks, and sighs, and double-meaning sentences, till, shut up with them a good deal these last wet days, I am nearly mad.”

This was said with half-petulant irritation, that was very unlike Mr. Newnham’s ordinary manner.

“Of course, under the circumstances, you find it difficult to know when you may be able to return. We shall miss you sadly, my dear fellow!”

“The term of my absence is so uncomfortably indefinite, that sometimes I have a sort of feeling it will end with my having to give up Newnham to Mrs. Falkner, and live somewhere else! Unless, indeed, I find the courage to write what I have not had the courage to speak—a plain declaration of ‘no intentions;’ but, my poor little cousin is so fragile, and so excitable, that if her mother has talked her into any poor little

romance of which I am the hero, I should be afraid she might suffer—in health I mean—from a sudden dis-illusion.”

Viola sighed. “She might die of it!” was spoken almost involuntarily.

“You don’t think, Miss Dalton, that, not loving her, and knowing I never could, or should love her, as she wants to be loved, if she loves me in the way her mother says, it could be my duty to—to marry her?”

“It would be presumptuous of me, I think, to answer that question—to speak on matters of which I have no experience.”

“Viola, my daughter, I think you are right there.”

“I do not,” Mr. Newnham said eagerly, his face flushing with eagerness. “True, high-minded women have no need of experience in these matters—they know the right about them, by instinct. I beg, not as a personal favour, but for the sake of my poor little cousin, that Miss Dalton will be good enough to answer my question.”

“I cannot answer it, except to say that I should think any suffering, and, certainly, death, would be preferable to a sensitive woman, to a consciousness that a sacrifice had been made for her—to a marriage that was not, on both sides, one of love.”



Viola spoke with her eyes fastened on her work, blushing as she spoke, but she spoke distinctly.

I should think that, in the years to come, they both of them often recalled that scene—those words ; his question and the last part of her answer.

Viola almost shuddered when she had spoken. She had spoken out of her sincere conviction, not able to speak otherwise. And, of course, since she had been an “engaged” girl, she had thought a good deal of these things ; but yet she shuddered, with a sort of feeling of having spoken Alma’s doom.

She hastened to add—

“This case is, however, peculiar. Alma—I don’t know—but she seems exceptional—I have a feeling that she will live but a very, very short life. And, it seems to me, difficult, impossible, not to love her.”

Then Viola laid down her work, and went softly away, leaving Mr. Newnham and her father to talk the matter over. She could not help longing that Mr. Newnham should sacrifice a few years of his life to making the few years of Alma’s life happy ; and yet she had felt as if she owed it to Alma—to womanhood, to speak against that sacrifice.

“I wonder what Lionel would think !”

In writing to him next she told him the whole story; and the only thing that made much impression on Lionel was the intimacy of intercourse there must be between Mr. Newnham and Viola before such a subject could be discussed between them.

He wrote to Viola about this; then, displeased with his own letter, he did not send it. It chanced he had no time to write again before that mail went out, and he had, through some accident, allowed the last to go out without his use of it; so one of those painful blanks in her life, which his silence caused, fell upon Viola again.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A JEALOUS FAIRY.

A DAY or two after Mr. Newnham had left the neighbourhood, Viola, from the window in which she was sitting, saw Alma, alone, on her pony, coming down the road, through driving, drenching rain.

She ran to the hall-door to receive her, a pang of fear at her heart. The girl's light summer habit clung close to her small form; it was evident she must be wet to the skin. Her hair, and the feather of her hat, hung straight, uncurled and dripping; she looked a most forlorn little object. But her brilliant eyes were larger and brighter than ever, and her thin white face was flushed with a hectic heat.

"Oh! Alma, how could you come through this rain? How could your mother let you be out on such a day!"

"Mamma can never prevent my doing what I choose to do."

"John, put the pony in the stable, and take

care of him. Miss Newnham will not go back in this weather."

"The pony is not to be put in the stable," said Alma. "I want to ask you one question, Miss Dalton, if I can speak to you alone, anywhere; then I am going back directly."

"You must not go back in this state, Alma. I will not allow it. Do as I said, John."

Alma, now she had dismounted, felt her limbs tremble under her, her breath came quick and hard: she would still have resisted, but she had hardly strength to stand.

When they were in Viola's room, Viola set light to the dry wood on the hearth, brought her flannel gown to wrap round Alma, and began to undress her.

She had taken off her hat and habit, and was wringing the water out of her wet hair, when the child suddenly snatched herself from the kind hands—till now she had so panted, that she had not had breath to speak—saying, "Let me alone, Viola Dalton. It is not these things that hurt. What matter whether I am wet or dry."

"Oh, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful,  
In the contempt and anger of her lip,"

Viola thought. "You want to speak to me, you said. To ask me a question," Viola remarked quietly. "You will find me both deaf

---

and dumb till you have taken off all these wet clothes, have dressed yourself in dry warm clothes of mine, have drunk a cup of hot tea, or soup, and are lying quietly on that sofa."

"Oh, you are wonderfully kind, Miss Dalton, about these things, that don't matter. I wonder shall I find you as kind about those that do."

"I hope so."

Little experience in illness as Viola had, she was frightened about Alma: the distance from Newnham to Orchardleigh was above two miles, and the child was, literally, wet to the skin. At present she was in a feverish heat, and, evidently, under strong mental excitement; but even now, her excessive weakness was apparent, and Viola was shocked at her extreme emaciation.

When Viola, after leaving her reluctant guest a few minutes to finish her toilet alone, returned to her, bringing a cup of hot tea, she found her stretched upon the couch which had been drawn up to the hearth for her use, her hands clasped above her head, her eyes wandering about, dreamily.

Her excitement seemed to have subsided, and to have been followed by great languor. The flush had left her cheeks, and Viola was startled at their ashen sort of pallor.

"What a strange, nice room you have, Miss

Dalton! I like it better than any room I have ever seen."

"I am very fond of it."

"I am so tired. What have you brought me?"

"A cup of tea; drink it while it is warm, dear, it may keep you from taking cold."

"I don't drink tea. It makes me ill."

"What may I get you, then? Wine? Soup?"

"I want nothing, but to rest—I am so tired, so tired; I couldn't have ridden back."

"You must take something, dear Alma."

"Must I? Then I will have this. What a pretty cup!" She stretched her hand for it.

"But if tea makes you ill, Alma?"

"I like this, it is nice," she answered, sipping from the cup. "It will do me good. Oh, I *am* so tired! I can't hold the cup, Miss Dalton, you must."

"I am afraid you are not very well, dear child!"

"I don't suppose I am. I hope I am not. I don't want to be. I want to die—unless——" The feverish flush was rising again.

"Don't you think you could sleep a little, and talk to me afterwards."

"No. I never sleep now. I don't want you to be kind to me, Miss Dalton. I don't want you to make me love you again. I have hated

---

you for two or three days! You are my greatest enemy."

"I should indeed be glad to think so, dear." Viola took the cup from the feverish trembling hand and smoothed the long straight hair.

"I *must* be helped!" Alma cried with sudden vehemence. "There is no one in all the world to help me. I cannot bear it. I must be helped. My heart is ready to burst, with loving and with hating! I try to hate you, Viola, and I hate mamma. It is her fault. She has made him loathe me—so that he has gone away, that he mayn't have me in his sight—and without bidding me good-bye, even. Didn't he tell you, Miss Dalton, that it was because of me he went away? You must answer me that question. I know he did. Oh, it is shameful, shameful, shameful!"

"Dear little Alma, try and be quiet."

"But I must be answered."

"No, dear, then, it was not because of you: he would have stayed, happily, but for Mrs. Newnham—but for your mother."

Alma's eyes were blazing into Viola's face, she leant up on her elbow.

"I don't wonder at it, not at all. Not at any of it! Not that he should hate mamma. Not that he should love you——"

"Alma! don't you know, haven't they told you, that I am engaged to someone who is far away—someone whom I love with all my life. I will let no one, not even you, poor child, talk of another man as loving me—with that love!"

Then Viola, from some sacred repository, brought forth some photographs of Lionel to show to Alma. She smiled as she gave them to Alma, thinking that even Alma could not fancy that a girl who had Lionel for a lover, could have a thought to spare for any other man.

And Alma looked long and earnestly at Lionel's face, at the powerful forehead and deep-set, intense eyes. She seemed fascinated by the face: she asked question after question about Lionel, and appeared for a few minutes to forget her own trouble.

"We have loved each other since we were children," Viola told her. "We belong to each other absolutely; neither of us could love anyone else—in that way of love. I cannot fancy the possibility of any life apart from him."

Alma lifted her glorious eyes from Lionel's face to Viola's. She laid the portraits in Viola's lap; she let her head fall back upon her arm, one cheek pillowed in its bend, she lay contemplating Viola.

"Thank you for showing me these. I can



understand now," she said, thoughtfully. "You look as if you belonged to each other. I can quite believe now that you would never love, never could love Vincent. Your Lionel looks like a man to be worshipped—I can fancy, even, being glad to be beaten by such a man; but," she dropped her voice, moved her head restlessly, clasped her hands. "*I do love my cousin Vincent! I do love him so; and now mamma has made him hate me—she has driven him away out of his own house. It is all so shameful, so shameful. I cannot bear to live!*"

"Hush, Alma, hush! He does not hate you. He spoke of you most tenderly!"

"Then why does he go away? You *know* he goes away because of us. Would he go away from me if he loved me."

"Because he loved you, perhaps, poor child; because he thought it for your happiness that he should go away."

"How could it be for my happiness that he should leave me? Oh! Viola, what lying folly to pretend it could be!"

"Dear Alma, I didn't say he loved you, as you mean love. He does love you tenderly as his dear little cousin, his pet play-fellow, as——"

"Ah!" cried Alma. "He thinks me only a child, he loves me as he would love a child, he makes a plaything of me—while I——"

"That is it," said Viola, pitifully, gravely; her cheeks were hot now. "And so, for your happiness, he goes away!"

"Goes away from my love (of which mamma has told him), because he cannot love me? It is all so miserable, so shameful. How can it be borne? How shall I bear it? What can I do?"

There was a silence, broken only by Alma's sobbing; then Viola said,

"Alma, as you love your cousin, couldn't you be strong, and make a sacrifice for his sake?"

Alma stilled herself, and looked up into Viola's face.

"If you could persuade your mother to take you away, for a time, perhaps in time——"

"Go away and never see Vincent again! And *you* advise this."

"No, Alma, no. To go away now, for a time. When you are older and wiser, and stronger, then, perhaps——"

"I must speak! I must tell! I can't help it!" Alma broke in excitedly. "In spite of all you have told me about your Lionel—and I believe it all, thoroughly, thoroughly—I seem to *know* that some day, possibly when I have been long dead, and nothing makes any difference to me, *you* will marry Vincent. I see you move about the rooms at Newnham, as their mistress. I hear my cousin call you 'wife.' Oh! Viola, he loves

you so, he loves you so, you will be forced to love him. You don't like the thought now," she went on, in spite of Viola's effort to check her. "You don't like the thought now." She saw that Viola had turned pale, and that she had shuddered. "You are faithful to him now," pointing to Lionel's portrait. "Perhaps you will be always faithful. But it *will come to be!* Vincent and Viola, Viola and Vincent—the names will go sounding in my head."

Viola got up from her seat.

"I cannot listen to this. To me it is horrible profanity. I shall find it difficult to forgive you, impossible to remain with you, if you talk in this way."

And Viola moved towards the door.

Alma cried out in despair,

"Oh! Miss Dalton, don't, don't leave me! I promise to say no more of these things. I will try to think no more of them. Do you think I find them so pleasant? And you will try and help me. You must help me. God must mean me to be helped—and who else is there to do it? He can't have made a creature like me, a poor weak little creature, only to suffer."

"Dear Alma, this life isn't all. Some of us have to suffer in this life to learn to be strong for another."

"I know nothing of those things!" cried

Alma impatiently, "nor do you! We only know about this world. And this world—this world that should be so pleasant, is grown to be a horrible place of blackness. It is as if I were always struggling about in my grave, where they had buried me alive. I feel the cold and the damp of the clammy clay press round me, closer and closer, choking me. Oh, Viola, help me! help me! I'm dying, and I'm afraid of death. The dark, the cold, the——It's horrible—it's horrible!" Her shrill thin voice rose almost to a scream.

"Alma, Alma!—my poor, poor child!" Viola knelt down beside her, took her head upon her breast, and wiped the cold damp off her forehead. "What is it you fancy I can do for you? How is it you think I can help you?"

There was an interval of silence, Alma lying with closed eyes; then she opened them wide and brilliant, and said,

"If only you could marry your lover at once! I don't believe Vincent could go on loving you so if he had no hope. If once you were married he might love me."

"Dear Alma, you are deceived by your own jealousy. Mr. Newnham is Lionel's loyal friend—he has no such feeling as you think for me."

Alma laughed a wild little laugh.

"I deceived! As if I could be deceived! As

if I did not understand his eyes! Why, Viola, he loves you so that the smallest thing you have touched or worn, a ribbon that has been in your hair, a rosette from your shoe, a flower from your bosom, is precious to him beyond anything I am or can be." •

She was shaking with the passionateness of her own words.

"I could prove this to you a thousand times over—I never lose one little sign of it. And for every smallest sign of it there is a stab in my heart."

"I shall send for the doctor, Alma. You would not talk so if you were not feverish."

"Perhaps not; but I should think so, know so, feel so, all the same. No doctor can do me any good: but you can, if you promise me help."

"Do you think, Alma, that, loving each other as we do, we should be living so far apart if there were not insurmountable reason for it?"

"There are other things you can do! You can praise me to Vincent—he hangs upon your words. Speak to him about me often, he will love to hear because you speak; love me, Viola, and he will love me because you love me. I am not proud, am I, when I can beg in this way? But I am proud. My words mean nothing. If he won't love me of himself, I will not have him love me! I can die! There is

always death!" A pause, then she shuddered. "Death!" she repeated. "It is easy to talk of dying when death seems a long way off; but sometimes, in the deep dark of the black night, when I wake up or lie awake all alone, feeling oh! so ill, and the darkness seeming to crush me and choke me, such a horror of dying comes over me! I can think of death as nothing but the turning of my warm flesh and blood into something cold, ugly, wormy, horrible; as the going out from me of what feels and suffers and knows, to fall and fall and fall, always through darkness, into some awful——" She broke off, and cried passionately, "Oh! Viola, help me to live up in the sunshine and free air, and among happy live things. I don't want to die—I am so young. I want to live. I want to be happy. I don't want to die!"

Alma's thin hands clutched at Viola; all her brilliant flush had again died away now, and left a thick earthy pallor—the ashen hue of death. It seemed as if this young creature, dying, fought with death. It was terrible.

Viola, while her blood ran cold, did what she could to soothe her: at last succeeding so well, that Alma fell into a heavy sleep. As Viola sat by her and thought about her, she could not help feeling as if, humanly speaking, Alma's fate was awfully in her hands.

She had only to write to Mr. Newnham, "I think you should come to your cousin, or she will die;" and she would secure for Alma a short delirious happiness: of days, or weeks, or months—hardly of years.

"May I go to bed? I am too ill to go back," were Alma's words when she wakened.

During her sleep Viola had sent a message to Mrs. Falkner Newnham, to say that Alma did not seem well, and that she would keep her at Orchardleigh that day: she had sent also for the doctor.

Alma's last words as, exhausted by the slight effort of moving from the sofa to the bed, she again fell asleep, were—

"If mamma comes, don't let her come near me! I couldn't bear her to come near me."

It was characteristic of the relation between mother and daughter that, while those were Alma's last conscious words, Mrs. Newnham's first thought, when she found that Alma was likely to be some time ill, was, to order from town a becoming and expensive wrapper, in which to play the nurse. But she was not able to wear it much at Orchardleigh. Her presence in the room painfully excited Alma; and the house, being so very much less luxurious in its appointments than Newnham, that she found it hardly "decently comfortable,"

she was the more willing to think that the kindest thing she could do was to wait quietly at Newnham till her time came, till her child, "having come to herself," should ask for her.

"I am used to this sort of paroxysm," she said to Viola. "In proportion as my darling dotes on me when she is well, she seems to dislike me when she is ill."

"Then the dislike can hardly be great," Viola could scarcely refrain from saying.

Mrs. Newnham told Viola that from the time of her cousin's departure till she came to Orchardleigh, Alma had not undressed or gone to bed, but had each night, all night long, walked to and fro in her room.

Before the arrival of Dr. Bertram, on waking from that heavy stupor of sleep, Alma, after a slight fit of coughing, ruptured a blood-vessel.

"Don't be frightened at that," she said to Viola, as soon as she could speak. "I've done it before."

Viola's hands were a little too full. She sent for Rosie to come home as soon as possible, to help to take care of and amuse her father; and Dr. Bertram sent in a nurse to help her with Alma: still there was too much strain upon Viola, coming upon her, as it did, when the an-



xious life she had been lately leading had already somewhat depressed her health and spirits.

## CHAPTER V.

## DEATH, OR LOVE ?

IT was a mild afternoon at the end of October. The orchard-trees stood stirless against a quiet sky, over which delicate sunset tints were almost imperceptibly stealing. Everything was breathlessly still.

Alma's bed was pushed near the open window—she had an insatiable craving for fresh air; she was sitting up, supported by pillows, over which the wealth of her dark hair streamed. She had been, for a long time, still and quiet, gazing out. Through all her illness she had shown a most touching sweet docility, a wondering gratitude.

It would be difficult to say how fondly Viola now loved her.

“Viola, am I going to die?” she suddenly asked.

Viola was startled at the spectral sort of beauty of the face at which she turned to look: at the intensity of solemn meaning in its eyes. There was a pause before Viola answered; dur-

ing that pause the silence was broken by the sudden singing of a robin.

"You know what Dr. Bertram said to-day, dear, that you are gaining strength steadily, though slowly—that he hopes to see you out-doors again before the cold weather."

"And then, when the cold weather comes, am I going to die?"

"You are to run away from the cold weather."

"The doctors have said so before, but mamma could not afford it."

"This time it is to be managed—it is all arranged. You have only to get strong enough to be able to travel."

Presently, with a world of wistful hunger in her eyes, Alma asked,

"Have *you* known what it is to be happy?"

"Yes, dear, yes. Indeed, I hope I am now happy."

Viola's eyes filled with tears as she said this. That morning's post-hour had brought her one of her keen pangs of disappointment.

"I should like to know what it is to be happy before I die. I fancy I shouldn't so much mind dying if I had been happy. I should know what happiness was, perhaps should find it not all I thought, and should be more willing to go out of a world where that was all. I have

never, all my life, been happy. I have had exquisite moments through beautiful things—and when I have written verses that I thought were good—but I have never been happy.”

“My darling, if, even, you should never, before you die, be happy, you know hope does not end here. This is not all.”

“I know all that,” said, a little wearily, but not with the half-angry impatience of a few weeks ago. “But I should like to be happy here, on this dear earth, in this sunshine, on this green grass, with this body, these senses. I do want to be happy! It can’t be wrong to want to be happy. Surely we were meant to know what it is to be happy.”

There was a little more life, a little more petulant impatience than there had been in her tone before since she fell ill. At this Viola rejoiced, as a sign of returning strength. Alma had been “too good,” with a heart-breakingly pathetic “goodness.”

“Your care has nursed me back to life, Viola, when, now, but for you, it might all have been over,” she went on. “What are you going to do with me when I am well? Deliver me over to the old bondage of the world and the devil, by which I mean mamma and my own wicked heart?”

“You are yet a long way from being well,

---

poor child. Perhaps by the time you are well some way will be shown us."

A pause. Then—

"Would you have let me die without seeing him again?" Alma asked, in a whisper.

"Though you have been very seriously ill, darling, there has never, in Dr. Bertram's judgment, been any near danger."

"Does he know I have been ill?"

"Yes, and he was very, very sorry. And it is he who has planned everything for your going to some warm and beautiful place for this winter."

"Why did he not come and see me? Any cousin might have done that."

"Dr. Bertram said we must keep you quite quiet."

"If he had come, if he had been kind to me—if he had kissed me, and I had had my arms round his neck—if it had made me worse, if I had died, in his arms, then I should have known what it was to be happy before I died."

Viola sighed heavily; the poor girl's face was flushing, her hands were trembling. How was this to end?

"I should get stronger now for seeing him," Alma insisted. "It was nothing but not seeing him made me ill. And the longing to see him keeps me from getting well. Viola,

you are not pleased with me. I know it! But how can I help loving him more than I can help living? I can help it less. I don't want much; only a little kindness—to see him sometimes. I am not to be cured of loving him, by not seeing him. While I live I shall love him; so, if I am not to love him, I must not live.”

“Be quiet, now, dear one, try to be quiet now, and I will ask Dr. Bertram if you may not see him very soon.”

“Is he near, then? Is he in reach? Oh! then, I will, I must see him!”

Viola, next day, explained to Dr. Bertram, who was puzzled and perplexed to find his little patient not so well.

“There is a very dear friend whom she frets and wearies to see. To see him will, of course, agitate her, but she never rests from longing to see him. What shall I do?”

“By all means let her see him.—You are not looking well yourself, my dear young lady. You have good news of the traveller, I hope?”

“Yes, I have good news.”

Viola had not then, lately, had a letter—as to “good news”—Well, the last had said that Lionel was well; that he was doing well; that the climate suited him admirably. He had spoken emphatically, too, of the beauty of the island. But the letter had ended with a burst

of passionate tenderness and longing, that had running through it such a sad, remorseful sort of wail of regret, that it had roused all sorts of vague, distressful feelings in Viola's heart ; and in the silence that followed she had had leisure to listen to them echoing there.

That evening Alma turned to Viola, and said, " Vincent is downstairs. You are going to let me see him. You will find I am so good and quiet. I will not do or say one thing that will pain you."

She spoke with a coaxing soft sweetness of entreaty, that would have been irresistible, even had it not been previously arranged that Mr. Newnham should this evening see her.

Viola had meant that Alma should have been moved out of the room, Viola's own room, where she had lain through all her illness, into the one adjoining, before she received her visitor, but Alma had been too weak all day to bear the slightest extra fatigue ; so, there was no help for it ; but Mr. Newnham must see her where she was, in Viola's own room. This was not pleasing to Viola ; she was no prude, but she had an instinctive sense of sacredness about her own room : it was consecrated by so many thoughts and memories and associations.

Viola was pleasantly surprised by Alma's way of receiving her cousin ; it was just what she

would have wished it to be—sweet, calm, frankly, child-likely, affectionate. His presence seemed to quiet all the feverish passionateness of feeling.

“Come and sit close to me, Cousin Vincent, I can’t talk loud yet.”

“My poor little Alma!” He kept the little thin, hot hand in his; he looked down at it to hide the moistening of his eyes, and sorrowfully noted the too visible net-work of veins.

“You were sorry, Cousin Vincent, when you heard I was ill?”

“Sorry—I should think so, little fairy. Grieved to the heart—and to the core of the heart.”

There was something more than he could bear to meet, of dumb appeal, in Alma’s eyes. He looked round the room to escape from it; but, soon, as the consciousness that it was Viola’s room, came over him, he, with an awed feeling of profaning its sacredness, looked back to the wan face with its wistful, watchful eyes; meeting the significance of which—for they had put their own interpretation upon the wandering look—he blushed as if his thoughts had been proclaimed.

“You are to be out again, they tell me, before the bad weather comes—not but what we’ve had bad weather all the summer this year; but before the winter bad weather comes.”

“And then the winter bad weather is to kill me.”



“Oh ! no, no, no ; when you are strong enough to bear it, we must take you up and run away with you, running after the summer.”

She looked at him in a way he couldn't understand.

“I don't think, Cousin Vincent, I shall ever be out any more. I am not so sorry, as I used to be to think of dying ; though I should have liked to be happy first. I'm not, I hope, quite so wicked as I used to be.”

“You wicked, poor child ! You must not think of dying, my little flower—what should I do without my little cousin ? Wouldn't you like to see Italy, Alma ? Wouldn't you like me to take you to Italy ? And to stay there with you ?”

She did not answer him ; he was very close, she moved her head from the pillow to lay it down upon his shoulder, and she closed her eyes.

Her face, when the eyes were closed, was so death-like, that he was startled ; he looked round for Viola, but she was not in the room. He looked again at Alma ; and now, a lovely delicate colour flushed her cheek, her mouth smiled. He put his arm round her, and drew her to rest on him more completely.

She breathed softly ; he believed she slept. He sat and thought ; not new thoughts, he re-

thought the old thoughts that, during the last few weeks, had been always in his mind.

When she woke should he speak? Should he say—

“You will let me take you to Italy, Alma, and be with you always there to care for you? You will be my own little wife, so that I never need leave you again?”

Should he speak thus?

His love was given, as was Alma's, where there was no hope of return. As he held the fragile little creature in his arms he recognized completely, how entirely all his tenderness for her might have been the pitying tenderness of a mother for her suffering child.

And yet upon such tenderness as he could give her she might live; should he let her die, so young, so lovely, so longing to live and to be happy? Should he see her die, and make no effort to save her? Would it not be good use to make of his own waste life to endeavour to give some weeks, or months, or years of happy life to this loving little creature?

But, yet, did it not seem an awful mockery to talk to her, on whom Death's hand seemed to be visibly laid, of wifehood, and of mortal Love? And, again, should Death give way before love, and life grow strong, and the woman's passionate heart wake in the girl, might not she, giving

her all of love, feel the all he alone could give, as worse than nothing, dust and ashes, Dead Sea fruit? Might she not reproach him that he had made her live, cheating her with so fair-seeming, so bitter, and so rotten a gift?

It was thus, he believed, that Viola feared and thought. Now, suddenly, Alma opened those wonderful eyes of hers, and smiled up to him, from where she lay, upon his breast.

"You have been asleep, my child." How the deep-toned tenderness soothed the poor, poor heart!

"Yes, and such sleep! so happy. Cousin Vincent, be near me when Death comes," she whispered. "To die so I shouldn't be afraid! I should be able, in dying, to think of God and of Love instead of Death and the grave; feeling how good your love for me is, though it is not your best love, I shall feel something of what God's love must be!"

Then he spoke. "Darling, don't talk of dying. Live to be my little treasure. I don't do much with my life, Alma, give me something to cherish, something to live for. When you are a little stronger, give me the right to take care of you always. Go with me to Italy, as my little wife?"

She did not speak; the colour went and came; she closed her eyes, tears forced them-

selves from under her long lashes. He looked at her wonderingly, not at all knowing how to interpret her silence.

Presently she lifted herself up to look fully in his face.

"Cousin Vincent," she said, "I have never felt as if I knew how to pray; but now, I feel I shall be able to pray to ask God to thank you and to bless you. I don't think I shall live. This comes too late—or, rather," she said, with a wan, pityful smile, "it is not really come at all—for—you—do—not love me—except for pity; but still——"

"Alma, I do love you. Live for my sake, my darling—you will be dearer and dearer."

"I know," she said, faintly, "I—understand—I——"

Here Viola entered—Alma's eyes appealed to her. Viola went to her, bent over her.

"Send him away, now. I can bear no more, but, he has made me so happy, so happy." Then the poor child fainted.

"Do you think I could ever make him love me?" she asked Viola, just before she slept that evening.

"My darling, he does love you."

"You know what I mean," sighed Alma. "It isn't worth while to answer me like that! No, it cannot last; but it is very happy! I shall not

live long enough to weary him out. It is very happy. But—I am glad I cannot live.”

Mrs. Falkner Newnham was formally told by Mr. Newnham that he was engaged to her daughter; that, as soon as she could possibly travel, he should take her abroad. She was delighted. She kissed him with effusion.

“Oh! she will soon be all right. There is nothing really serious the matter. It is chiefly on the nerves. She fretted about you. She will soon be well now.”

“You seem to forget that diseased lungs are not so lightly cured.”

“I don’t believe her lungs are less good than yours, Vincent.”

The subject was to both of them distasteful: they did not pursue it.

Perhaps Mrs. Falkner Newnham had never been so really anxious about Alma’s health as now. If only she would live to be married! Mrs. Falkner Newnham was getting tired of the retirement in which now, for so many months, for her darling’s sake, she had been living. Constant anxiety was preying upon her health, she said.

Mr. Newnham was so considerate and disinterested as to beg her not, on his account, to prolong her stay at Newnham just now, if she desired change. Finding that there was not

likely to be any quick improvement in Alma, she decided to absent herself from the neighbourhood for a few weeks, returning when there was any chance of removing Alma from Orchardleigh. She was not again heard of till after the end. Then there came a letter from her, dated from Homburg, saying that she had been ill, confined to her room, unable to travel, or to write. She spoke of the "awful shock" it had been to her to hear of her darling's death. She filled her letter with extravagant expressions of grief—said not one sentence that had the ring of true feeling in it. Just, at the end, she mentioned that she was about to be married.

"Alma must have been right, papa. That woman could not have been her mother!" was Viola's comment on that letter.

Alma was right. She was not the daughter of Mrs. Falkner Newnham. It was a strange story, but one there is no room and no need to tell here.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ALMA'S HAPPINESS.

“**T**OO happy to die,” she said, Alma lingered on, month after month. But she never gained sufficient strength to make any change, save that from one room to another, possible. A pretty little, half-conservatory, sunny room over the porch had been fitted up for her, and here Mr. Newnham passed great part of every day with her. Thorough in his devotion, he seemed to live only for her; he read to her, talked to her, played chess with her, fed her even: brought her fruit, flowers, photographs, engravings, illustrated books, was always trying to devise for her some fresh amusement or pleasure. He nursed her as tenderly as a mother could nurse a sick child; he loved her, too, each day more tenderly; and little Alma, sunning herself in love and tender tendance, serenely happy, tormented her heart with no question as to the nature of his tenderness, the kind or the degree of his love.

Freely as he gave she accepted, and not whol-

ly in thoughtlessness or selfishness, for she sometimes said to Viola, "It won't last long enough to wear him out; and, when I'm gone, he will like to remember how happy he made me, how good—how very good he was to me."

It was "Cousin Vincent" who was to do everything. He learnt to arrange her pillows in a way to please her better than could anyone else, even Viola. He carried her in his arms from one couch to another when she was restless.

To say he was unwearied was to say nothing—he seemed to know no possibility of weariness. No wonder poor little Alma, who had never before known tender nursing and careful love, was happy. When she had had illnesses before, she had struggled through them as best she could, with the sometimes fretful fuss, sometimes neglect of her mother, and the hard practical service of her mother's old servant—who did not like, but, a little, pitied her.

"Surely, dear Viola, your Lionel *can't* be as good as our Vincent!" Alma said one day; but she never again said that, or anything like that, seeing the pain that overclouded Viola's face.

During these months Mr. Newnham lost flesh and colour: he was unused to such close confinement within doors: he broke through all his own habits of life, and he was, by nature, fasti-



diously regular and punctual. He dined now just when it suited best that Alma could do without him ; and she, poor child, grew more and more sleepless, restless, uncertain. He sat up at night to do the business of the day for which he had not had time in the day, and he was quite unused to short or broken rest. Of course this devotion was a double devotion, both of pity and of love. The pity was Alma's portion—the love was Viola's. To take the burden off Viola, who showed signs that life pressed upon her too heavily, he would have done all he did—and more. Out of pity for sweet little Alma, however, he would also have done all he did—and more.

It was not a devotion of hours, days, or weeks, but of months. And Alma knew what of this devotion was hers, and what was Viola's. She watched and watched with her great beautiful eyes, which nothing escaped, and she thought and felt behind them. Love and Death struggled for mastery in her. Death would sooner have been the vanquisher had she known that Vincent was loved, or hoped that he ever could be loved where he loved. Love might have been the vanquisher, could she have dreamed of hope that he would love her—even as she loved him ; that she could ever suffice for his happiness, as he for hers. As it was, she

was just content to stay while she might : content to stay, not passionately averse to go.

“ Vincent will be lonely when I am gone, and *he* comes home and takes Viola !” she thought. “ Surely I am better to him than nothing.”

And each day was, in spite of increasing weakness, oppression and suffering, happy. Sometimes she was even merry : and merry at her cousin's expense. She would set him to read to her some favourite passage from some favourite book—some high-flown rhapsody—that she might snatch the book from him, laughing at his inadequate delivery, and try to show him, till her cough stopped her, how it should be done. Or she would question him as to the meaning of some such passage, to laugh at his honestly puzzled face and his blundering answers, the face exaggerating his puzzlement, and the answers his perplexedness to increase her amusement.

Leaning exhausted on his shoulder, while his gentle hand wiped the moisture of weakness from her forehead, she would smile up into his eyes, and say,

“ You are not clever, Cousin Vincent ; you are good, that is your way of being great. You are good, good, good ; but as to knowing how to read passionate poetry !—or, as to understanding it !”

"How can you care for so prosaic a fellow?"

"I want something as different as possible from my wearying little self."

"And yet," she one day added, "there is a great poem in your life. You know how to love with deep, faithful, unselfish devotion, if ever any man did."


Mr. Newnham's face flushed.

"I love you, little Alma, very dearly."

"I know you do, darling, and you pity me very much; and when I am gone you will miss me very much, and you will grieve over me very much—as you might over a child you had been very good to, and very fond of. But that is not what I mean." She pulled his handsome head down, so that she might whisper in his ear. "With the love of love you love Viola."

"Those words must not be spoken," he said, almost sternly.

"You cannot say they are not true. What a strange muddle the world is!" she went on. "Doesn't it just seem to want setting right? But perhaps its being so wrong is what is to set us right. I am a little heathen, mamma says, Vincent! I shouldn't like to be a Christian if she is one. How shocked you look! Do you know I sometimes quite believe that she is not my mother. It was important to her to have a child when—Oh! but you don't know our history,



and it's a pity more people than can be helped *should* know it; and I suppose I should not speak of it to you, though I feel as if I could always speak to you of anything I think, of any kind. What was I talking about before? Oh! of the world being all such a muddle. And isn't it? Think of you loving—" she left a pause, and did not name the name—" as you do, of my loving you as I do; of Viola loving that Lionel Beverley as she does, with all the strength of her strong nature; while he? Does he love her as he should?"

"He did; doubtless he does. That is not one of life's mistakes, dear Alma."

"It is. For you are not happy, and Viola is not happy."

"I trust in God you are mistaken as to that last!"

"Sometimes she is sad because his letters do not come; then sometimes when they come she is sadder, and——"

"Little Alma," starting up from her side, "I must not hear this!"

"Oh, if they loved each other why did they part? Why are they not together? When people love each other, what in this world can matter except being together?" cried Alma.

As the spring stole on, Alma grew weaker and weaker; the mortal shell seemed to grow

thinner and more transparent. The look of fragility was so excessive, that Mr. Newnham sometimes hesitated to touch her.

"My hands are too strong—too hard—too rough."

"It is their very strength makes them so tender. No one hurts me so little—gives me so much ease."

Mr. Dalton would often sit in the same room with Alma. The dying girl and the hopelessly invalided man, whose very life was already dead, seemed to have much in common. They would often, when they were alone together, sit and muse at each other, and then exchange smiles that seemed to claim for each the other's understanding of unspoken thoughts.

One evening, when Mr. Dalton was about to be helped from the room, Alma asked him to kiss her; then when he stooped over her, she threw her arms round his neck and whispered something in his ear; he did not catch the words. She was too weak, exhausted by a sudden voluntary movement, to repeat them. He was only aware that instead of "good night" she had said "good-bye." Did she beg a rendezvous in the other world?

On this evening Alma had been wheeled to the window, just to watch the last sunshine flush rosier some blossom-covered apple-trees.

It was a most tender spring evening, songful and sweet and soft. The casement open till the sun should set, there floated in a dim and subtle fragrance of leaves, of flowers, of dew, of life and growth, of very spring.

Alma looked out, and sighed ; then she looked up into Mr. Newnham's face, into his kind, kind eyes, with a world of dumb eloquence in hers, such a wistfulness, as if her soul sought to pierce through and speak ! Then, with something of the same look, but less intense, she turned on Viola. After that the same eloquent eyes again read the fair face of the world.

"No memory in the grave?" she murmured ;  
"but in heaven we shall remember."

Little Alma could only now speak with gasps and pauses.

"It is a year, just a year, since I came to Newnham. In this year I have had my life, its sorrow, its joy, its love."

Viola slipped away. There was something more than she could bear of half-anguished, half-yearning pathos in the poor child's face and voice. Sometimes, too, it was more than Viola could bear, to sit by and listen to what Alma said, and the way she said it, when the two were not alone. She spoke as if out of a bared soul ; as one might speak who has done with the world, and the things of the flesh ; nor

did there ever seem to have been fully matured in her the woman's instincts of reserve, of self-veiling self-control; of instinctively knowing what to say, and to whom to say it. To Viola it often seemed that only Lionel's presence was the presence to be borne when Alma talked, as sometimes she talked. And often Alma set Viola's heart aching with an almost unendurable ache. When they were alone now, Alma looked up into her cousin's face, and said,


"I am glad you do not love me. Remember that I was glad—that there has been nothing in which you have made me sorry, but always happy."

"But I do love you, my child, I do. Oh! Alma, little Alma, don't doubt it—I do!"

"You know what I mean."

He only caressed the hand he held in his, holding it to his cheek, and to his lips; he began to talk to her of the spring, and the spring-flowers: of what blossoms were already plentiful, what were only just beginning to come out; what flowers he should bring her in her nosegay of to-morrow.

"To-morrow!" she echoed. "Yes, you will bring me flowers to-morrow. Lilies-of-the-valley I should like to-morrow. You don't ask me why I am glad you do not love me?" she presently said, "but I want to tell you. Because I know



I am dying soon. If you loved me, as I craved for you to love me, it would be so hard, so hard to die, and yet I know now that I cannot live. So, now, I feel, it is best so, God knows—He is good. I never have been good—and yet I feel as if God loves me—I feel—as if—somewhere, His arms of infinite rest—were open—that to die would be to sink into them. It is a blessed feeling. It is your goodness—your pitying, protecting love that has taught it to me.”

He could see the moisture start to her forehead, and stand there in pearly drops.

“Don’t try to talk. You are too weak this evening,” he said, brokenly, laying his face softly against hers.

“This evening !” she repeated, with a strange smile. “I shall never be stronger.”

Presently she begged to be lifted up, to look out once more, and see the three-days-old moon set out of the pearly sky.

He lifted her in the careful manner he had learnt, with a gradual equal movement. Even this change of posture was, however, to-night, almost enough to blow out the wavering torch. Yet, after a few moments, during which she seemed to struggle for life, she, of her own strength, rose more upright; she stretched her arms out towards the evening, her face one yearning. Then she turned a little, trying to



fling them round him ; but they dropped—she fell back against him.

He cried out for Viola. Viola came. A few moments, and the mortal agony was over. Little Alma had suffered out the suffering of this life, and drunk out such joy as it had held for her.

## CHAPTER VII.

## HOW THEY MISSED HER.

“**O**H! that it were already so with me!” These words rose in Viola’s heart, almost to her lips, as she stood and gazed upon the perfect peace of Alma’s lovely face as she lay in her coffin, strewed with white wild wood-lilies, which her cousin had gathered that morning. Till she was conscious of that half-formed wish, Viola had not recognized how tired she was, heart, soul, and flesh—how worn and weary she was, with the pressure of burdens borne, and the prescience of those to be; with the sense of past and present struggle, and forebodings of evil to come.

The thought that now, of her worst care, her heaviest heaviness, no one knew anything, had in it something both of balm and of bitterness. She knew that the dead girl had suspected something of her troubles. But it was far oftener than Viola knew, that Alma had wakened and watched her in the dead of the night, when she wrote to Lionel those letters for which the day

often brought no solitary leisure. Viola, for Lionel's sake, had been jealously reluctant that even those dying eyes should know of her tears—and yet, now those eyes were for ever closed, life seemed more blank and lonely. Alma had seen the pen laid down from Viola's hand, and the hands, and the eyes from which tears streamed, raised to heaven in appeal. And now—"Oh! that it were already so with me!" breathed Viola's sad and heavy heart as she looked at little Alma.

Had it come to this? "Oh! no, no, no!" cried Viola, startled at her own thought. "God forgive me! I am not *so* faithless! but I am tired and very weak!" And she put her lips upon the cold forehead! And she clustered the lilies together on the shroud, and went away.

Something of what Sir Launcelot felt, gazing on the dead beauty of the Lily Maid of Astolat, Vincent Newnham must have felt as he looked his last at his little cousin.

So young! and never to pick the roses again; never to smell the lilies again; never to feel the sunshine again. Little feet, never to move on the turf again; little head, never to pass under blossoming boughs again; little hands, never to clasp and cling again; little sweet mouth, never to pout for kisses again. Vincent Newnham neither said nor thought these words; said no

words; but some such thoughts rose in him. She was exquisitely lovely, a little dead girl-bride, as she lay there, her small white face shining out from the wealth of dark hair that almost hid the pillow; her hands folded on her breast, holding a bunch of lilies. As yet she was not shut up in darkness. The soft spring air and light filled the room in which she lay. How would they bear to shut her up in the darkness? Now, when the spring-time world was one world of blossom, would it not seem impossibly cruel to put away in the darkness, and out of the beauty, this human blossom?

“Alma, little Alma, surely, even as you loved me, should I have loved you, had you stayed a little longer.”

Could she have heard, could she have believed, might she not have come back again? But if she could have heard she would also have known, as he knew even as he spoke, that it would not have been so—that it never would nor could have been so. Even before he had finished speaking, something within him cried, “Never!” Yet more consciously he heard this cry of “never!” when, having looked his last upon the dead girl, turned away from her after his last farewell, his eyes rested next on Viola. On Viola sad and pale, hardly less calm and pure to look upon than the dead; on Viola, so graci-

ously womanly in ways and speech, so softly stately in movement; his Viola, who would never be his; the one woman of the world for him who would never in this world be for him; the queen of his heart, of his life, of a love untouched with hope.

Stirred to the depths by the emotions he had lately gone through, he was startled, as by a sudden revelation, at the might of the love for Viola that swept through his soul, as he wept tears of pity, of pathos, of regret for the child who had so loved him! He learnt now, and he learnt with fear and trembling, how, during the months when he had believed himself pre-occupied, his love for Viola had grown and grown. How could it be otherwise, intimately as they had been associated, and in a manner to bring to light so much of what was deepest and richest and sweetest in her from whom the least hint of beauty sufficed to suggest to him a perfect whole?

Had Viola looked happy, looked well, things would have been easier and safer. But the paleness of her face, and the frequent sad languor of her eyes, of her movements, would not let him rest. Sometimes he thought he would go to Lionel, to tell him how pale the cheeks were—how sad the eyes; then, perhaps, Viola, next time he saw her, looked brighter and better.

He was a fool for his pains of anxious thought, he then told himself; naturally she was tired—months of broken rest would make the happiest girl look sometimes pale and languid.

His thoughts, his schemes about Viola were always at this time entirely untouched by any selfish and personal hope. He thought he knew that, were Lionel dead to-morrow, did Viola live on for fifty years, she was still to the end of life Lionel's; he thought he knew that, if his own path and hers ran always to the very end side by side, they would always to the very end be *two* paths, his and hers—they would never merge in one.

All his days now seemed strangely empty and dreary; he felt terribly at leisure. There was no one now to want him. No eyes now to brighten when he came, to follow wistfully, regretfully, when he left. No voice now to say, "Come back soon." No eager little hand now stretched itself out to greet his return, as if it would hasten his approach, draw him more quickly near.

He missed all these things, and he was sad to miss them. But, whether he knew it or not, what he missed most, and what it most saddened him to miss, was the constant and close association with Viola.

A great blank had fallen upon his life, a chill

had crept to his heart. His occupation was gone. His time hung heavy on his hands. His house, from which he had now no excuse for such constant escape, seemed very lonely, very dreary.

He had loved to humour Alma; to obey all her little commands, to gratify her slightest wish. He had felt a sort of second-hand happiness in his own power to make her happy: the consciousness of her love for him had soothed him.

She had been a little creature of infinite variety; till he had lost her he had no notion how she had filled his life. Hardly a day but she made some pretty little request, imposed upon him some fantastic task.

He missed her as a father—almost as a mother—misses a child. He remembered fondly her pretty ways, her loving looks, her passionate words. He was more nearly in love with his memory of the strangely bewitching little one, than he had ever been with herself—and yet—he knew there was but one woman in the world for him, that woman Viola Dalton, who was not for him. And whether or not he knew it, he missed most the sunshine of approving recognition that had fallen on him from her eyes. After a time he remembered Alma as we remember spring in the fragrance of autumn violets, as we remember summer, if, in winter-time, we smell a

---

rose—remembered her with pathos, with more or less of regret ; but the memories that were passionate within him were memories of Viola—of looks she had looked, and words she had said, and warm hand-grasps of sisterly sympathy she had given him.

A few days after Alma's funeral, Mr. Newnham brought to Viola a sealed parcel ; it was early in the day, Mr. Dalton was not yet down, Viola was alone.

"She wished us to look over these things together, and to decide together what to do with them. But my judgment is worth nothing in such a matter, and I think you might prefer to turn them over alone. I feel ashamed to ask of you any one thing more. You look so worn out. You do everything for everybody. Can nothing be done for you ?" his eyes moistened with the tenderest earnestness. Those last words had escaped him, had been entirely unpremeditated.

Viola's pale face flushed a little proudly. It did not seem loyal to Lionel that she should be pitied by Mr. Newnham.

"Of course I am a little worn just now," she said gently, but coldly. "I don't deny that some times I feel the pressure of various anxieties to be rather heavy ; but, I suppose, it is only the very young who have no burdens to bear. You,



yourself, Mr. Newnham, are showing that the last few months have told upon you."

"If I might dare speak to you—there is one subject——"

Viola raised her eyes to his: under her quiet, steady gaze he blushed, hesitated, stopped.

The subject in his thoughts was very different from being that which was so much in Viola's, that she imagined it to be in his too. By his blushing and his hesitation, he confirmed her suspicions; and a look of cold displeasure followed that of quiet inquiry.

"I will not trouble you. I will speak to Mr. Dalton," he stammered. "I am thinking of going away for a few weeks; perhaps I shall start to-morrow. I should be glad to speak to him first. Will he soon be down?"

"Of course," she replied, "I have no right to dictate to you on what subjects you should speak to my father, but—" Then Viola hesitated, it suddenly occurring to her that there was another subject than that on which her thoughts had turned, about which Mr. Newnham, in his delicacy, would speak with blushing hesitation.

"If it is about money," she said, relieved, and yet annoyed—"papa told me you had been speaking to him about the 'expenses' we have incurred while Alma was ill—if it is about money

there is no need to say anything. We are not yet so badly off as to require compensation—— Forgive me, Mr. Newnham, I cannot tell you how I feel your goodness, but, somehow——” She finished with a burst of tears; there seemed to her such a complicated pain about everything.

Mr. Newnham regarded her with silent consternation: he had not thought of Viola as a woman to weep, except for grave sorrow; of course he had set her upon a pedestal much higher than she had any right to stand upon. And now he saw her in tears that were, evidently, tears of weakness and over-fatigue, he dared attempt no word of consolation.

She controlled herself almost immediately, and began to unfasten little Alma’s packet.

“There is no occasion to trouble yourself with that to-day. Can you not go out? Or get some rest?”

“I would not like to put off doing anything she wished done.”

Then, as she began turning over Alma’s manuscripts, she said, with one of those heavy sighs that come up out of the depths, before we are aware,

“Lionel would have known at a glance the worth of these things. Do you know if Alma had any decided wish about them?”

"I fancy she had a sort of lingering desire for the publication of some of the best, if you thought well."

"He would have known at a glance," she repeated. "At every turn of my life, in great things and small, I miss him—I want him." She seldom spoke from as far below the surface; there was a ring in her voice now that was new to him. "However," she went on, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "the time is passing, it is possible he may be home before it has all run out. I must be patient."

"How old was Alma?" she then asked.

"She would have been seventeen next month." He added,

"I know my judgment about these things is not of any value. I know she did not think it was, so, please, be so good as to decide for me."

Viola, by-and-by, when she had seen her father comfortably settled, did what Mr. Newnham wished her to do—took the manuscripts away with her, to her own room. So he could speak freely with her father. Of course he knew that Alma's long illness had, in spite of his watchfulness, his ingenuity of intervention, entailed many expenses upon the Orchardleigh household; he knew, too, that Mr. Dalton was little able to bear any calls upon him; knowing

that he had, again, just lately, had a payment to make of which Viola knew nothing.

Mr. Newnham longed to take Mr. Dalton's affairs entirely into his own hands. He did not dare even to propose this, lest the proposal should be told to Viola.

So he contented himself, for the present, with doing, from time to time, little more than Mr. Dalton asked him to do. Writing for Mr. Dalton—letters Mr. Dalton could not write for himself, and was reluctant to dictate to Viola—and making, for Mr. Dalton, calculations to which Mr. Dalton found his own head quite unequal.

"In this way we save Viola, poor child, a good deal of worry and anxiety," her father said.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## SOME OF ALMA'S "POEMS."

SO Mr. Newnham sat writing business letters, and making calculations for Viola's father, while Viola, in her own room, read little Alma's manuscripts. First, she read some lines which Alma had called "A Dying Girl's Longing," beginning—

"That I, just once, might lean upon his breast,  
And so, just once, might try this world's best rest.  
That once, just once, my lips on his might meet—  
That I, just once, might try this world's pure sweet—"

Running, in something this way, through a catalogue of simply-passionate love-longings, the lines ended:—

"But no, ah no, for then I could not go!  
Best as it is, fade so, die so,  
Not lingeringly, from bliss, but longingly from woe."

Further on she read,

"Give love, not heeding if the cost be pain.  
Give love, not looking to win love again.  
To count the cost in love is true love's bane.  
Selfish self-seeking oft has true love slain."

Then,

“ Just in the common ground,  
Not deep beneath the mould,  
My grave not crossed, nor crowned,  
Nor paled, nor planted round,  
Put me when I am cold.

“ Have me not darkly laid,  
Between close-vaulted walls,  
Where comes nor sun nor shade,  
Nor song nor sigh is made,  
Nor tear nor rain-drop falls.

“ Let the dear children's feet  
Unconscious pass me by,  
Young love breathe low and sweet,  
Young lips in kisses meet  
Above where I low lie.”

That was dated very lately. Then, presently she came to this—written longer ago :—

“ ‘ Black, black is the world,’ she said.  
‘ A bier beneath, and a pall o’er head,  
Black, black is the world,’ she said.  
‘ And I would, I would that I were dead !  
Cold and dead and laid away  
Senseless ’neath the senseless clay.  
Once there came a break in the cloud,  
That folds and holds me like a shroud :  
A voice spoke through, of love and light,  
I felt the blackness growing white.  
But soon the voice was wrapped away  
In silence grim and black as aye.  
Black and grey and dull and dun,  
I laugh to hear them speak of the sun !  
Black, black, is the world,’ she said,  
‘ A bier beneath and a pall o’er head,  
And I would, I would that I were dead.’ ”

Then Viola read,

“With passionate longing, wild unrest,  
The heart is beating within my breast.  
What is it in the sighing  
Of winds, as day is dying,  
As sinks the ruddy sun into the ruddy west,  
Silencing the song of each bird within its nest,  
That stirs the underlying  
Unquenchable trouble of life,  
Wakens this voiceless crying—  
This impotent passion of strife?”

Dated on Alma's last New Year's Day, inscribed, “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist!” were these lines—

“The old, old year has crept away,  
In it I said each morn—  
‘Full sure,’ I said, ‘he'll come to-day,  
Or would I were not born!’  
And now the year is gone  
Quite away!

Each long night, to soothe my passion's sorrow,  
While I wept and sighed,  
I yet wildly cried,  
‘To-morrow!—sure he must come to-morrow.’

“The old, old year has crept away,  
And the new, new year is born,  
On the wind float voices that sing and say,  
‘This is no mortal dawn,  
This is thy New Year's morn,  
Come away.’”

The last thing Viola read was called, “The Song of a Mad Girl.”

- " Just for the sum of bliss  
That was in your clasp and kiss,  
Gave I my life away ;  
Then it was the full-flowered May,  
Now beneath this wintry moon,  
Just as on that sunny noon,  
I love you, love, I love you,  
I swear by heaven above you,  
I love you, love, I love you.
- " And, had I ten lives more,  
I would give them o'er and o'er,  
Just to feel again the bliss  
That was in your clasp and kiss,  
Drear December or sweet May  
I would give them all away.  
So much, my love, I love you,  
So much, by heaven above you,  
So much, my love, I love you !
- " And had I more than life,  
Or were more sharp the knife,  
Past and again repast—  
Making Death sure and fast—  
Through my poor quivering heart,  
Gashing, " We part, we part,"  
Upon its inmost core—  
Gashes that ne'er close o'er,  
Yet for the sum of bliss  
That was in your clasp and kiss,  
Spring-time sun or winter rain,  
I should stretch me towards the pain !  
With such wild love I love you,  
So much, by heaven above you,  
And with such love I love you.
- " You think that, lying here,  
I know no hope nor fear ;



I, too, had heard it said  
That it was so with the dead—  
That they sleep all dreamless sleep,  
Neither wake, nor watch, nor weep !  
But, alas, it is not true,  
Well I know you love anew.  
Well I know the priceless bliss  
Of your close love-clasp and kiss  
Now is for a maiden fair,  
Heaven-blue-eyed with sun-spun hair.  
One, who, by the heavens above you,  
Not with love like mine doth love you,  
Not with love like mine can love you !

“ And when, at noon or night,  
Whether in the dark or light,  
Quick-stepped or slow you pass,  
Treading the dank church-yard grass—  
(Strangely they have made my grave,  
For I see it stir and wave !)  
I know it by a sudden thrill,  
I am not able to lie still,  
So I strain me towards the bliss,  
That was in your clasp and kiss.  
As when I lived I love you !  
In death, by heaven above you,  
As when I lived I love you !

“ So I lie and wait for you,  
Waiting in the snow and rain,  
Waiting till the skies are blue,  
When you will be mine again.  
This I know full clear and well,  
That either in high heaven or hell,  
After this long swoon of pain,  
You will be my own again.

For me again the all of bliss,  
That is in your clasp and kiss !  
'Tis I, love, I, who love you.  
By the high heaven above you,  
'Tis I, love, I, who love you !

" So I lie and wait, and wait,  
When they pass and swing the gate,  
Saying soft, ' He comes at last,'  
When they come and toll the bell,  
Saying slow, ' 'Tis well, 'tis well !'  
But the steps go past, go past.  
' Not for him,' I hear one tell,  
' Not for him they toll the bell !'  
For all that, in heaven or hell,  
This I know full clear and well,  
You will be my own again !  
Mine again !—my own again !

" Past all this craze of pain,  
Mine again !—my own again !  
Mine again the wide wild bliss  
Of your closest clasp and kiss.  
Mine again !—my own again !  
On my ear I faintly feel  
Music of the mystic peal,  
Mine again !—my own again !  
Mine, for by the heaven above you,  
Whether in heaven or hell, I'll love you,  
I'll love you, love, I'll love you."

Viola sat and mused : with pale face, glistening eyes, and perplexed brow she sat and mused about little Alma. Those things she had set aside as the best were not the most passionate. The heat had tingled to Viola's face as she read some of the passages written by this child.

Alma's was not a nature that Viola could understand, or with which she could fully sympathize. Alma's was, perhaps, the temperament of genius. There burnt in her some portion of that something which needs direct individual expression; which will not be content to express itself, or find itself expressed, by the work of others; which burns through disguises and reserves, and leaves the soul and heart, in some sort, bare.

Viola was, *par excellence*, a woman; shrinking from all laying bare of the inmost heart of her life; feeling wounded by the touch of anything that sought to draw aside the veil of her reserves; content with indirect expression, through the work of others, of the music and poetry of existence.

Is it not a mistake to say that genius has no sex? If, in a few instances, it is, to some degree, entrusted to the hands of women, does it not stand beside them rather than enter into them? make them conscious of a duality of nature, of an incessant inward strife, and spoil the happy simplicity and beautiful singleness of their lives. Do they not feel as if a voice had said to them, as to a woman of old, "A sword shall pierce through thy own heart, that the thoughts of many may be revealed"? It is a gift, by which they poorly know how to profit,

the use of which they barely comprehend. It is a weapon too mighty for their wielding, and which, yet, leaves them no rest, while they are conscious that it lies rusting in its sheath. It is a goad, a scourge, and yet a glorious joy.

Viola hesitated about these poor little papers of Alma's. To keep them for the present, and some day, some happy day, to consult with Lionel over them, was what she wished to do : meanwhile, to keep them very safely locked away and sealed. She sat long and mused about Alma. What, if she had lived, could have become of the child? It seemed to Viola that it was, in this case, far easier than in most, to feel that one understood the goodness of God in taking the child to Himself. To marry "Cousin Vincent," even if Cousin Vincent had loved her as she craved to be loved, could not, it seemed to Viola, have been to Alma "to live happy for ever after," even with that approximation to fairy-tale happiness which is all that is possible to poor mortality. For it did not seem to Viola that this love of Alma's for her kind, handsome, hearty, matter-of-fact, prosaic cousin could be the love of a life with such a girl as Alma. It was rather, she thought, the girl's first love, before the woman's passionate heart was awake, for the first person who had been kind to her, and who was good and strong enough to rouse

her respect. A love that, as a sister's love for a brother, might have been to her a help and happiness all her life long. But a love that, taken as the love of love—the wife's love for her husband—would soon have been outworn and outgrown, and might even have turned to indifference or hate.

She, an Elaine, had made of Vincent Newnham a Sir Launcelot; but the days were past when, by good doughty deeds, her Sir Launcelot could have kept up the prestige of his knight-hood, and have been always winning the praise of men and of ladies. The "earthly woman" might in time have come to feel that she had loved "out of measure" the "earthly man," and that it had been better had she died for the love of one she thought "so noble a knight," trusting to the "High Father of Heaven to have mercy upon my soul, and upon mine innumerable pains that I suffered," that these "may be allegiance of part of my sins," better to have died than to have lived to know disillusion.

---

# **BOOK VII.**

**THE BEGINNING OF THE END.**



## CHAPTER I.

## HOW IT WAS WITH VIOLA.

“ **A**NOTHER mail in. Again no letter from Lionel !”

Of all the words in the world Viola now hated and dreaded to hear these words, spoken with a tremulous sternness by Mr. Dalton. They could make her writhe and wince: they included, in the way they were spoken, accusation and condemnation of her dearer self.

As she answered, “I did not much expect to hear this mail, papa; this is the time of year when he is most busy;” or, “I should have been surprised to hear to-day, papa, for I know he expected to be incessantly occupied during the Governor’s visit,” Viola almost longed to be able to lie, saying, with quiet look and steady voice, that she had heard, when no letters had come—that Lionel had written so and so, when he had been long silent.

But, alas, the not hearing from Lionel was not now the worst and heaviest of Viola’s



troubles. Lately, sometimes when she had heard she had been pained with a bewildering sort of pain that, for a while, not only clouded over the fair face of the world, but darkened between her and heaven. In comment on the full confidences, the loving and trusting confidences of Viola's letters, which strove to lay before him all her life, Lionel had sometimes lately written in a way that seemed to Viola so coldly and cruelly cynical, so willing, almost anxious, to misinterpret what she did and said, to find in her lapses from duty to him, and more sympathy, love and life than was fitting given to others, that Viola perplexedly, word by word, line by line, studied these letters, almost believing she might discover them to be forgeries, not Lionel's at all. If not, whose? But the very same letters would contain passages so unmistakably Lionel's, so passionate in love and longing, and, at the same time, so despairingly self-reproachful, that they deepened the nightmare-like enigma, while they closed the door on that only solution.

"I can only wait," sighed Viola; "try to make him feel more than ever sure of my love and trust, and wait."

It was impossible the fear should not cross her that Lionel was beset by, was, more or less, yielding to some baneful influence.

It was, also, impossible that, when visited by this fear, her thoughts should not turn to Caspian: to the always unbroken and unexplained silence about Caspian. About Caspian who hated Viola, as she knew how to hate; and who loved Lionel, as she knew how to love. Yet she felt that she degraded both herself and Lionel when she thought with dread of Caspian.

Bravely, and yet most delicately, Viola, after much prayerful thought, spoke to Lionel about the changed tone of his letters; about the cold, offended, injured manner in which he now sometimes spoke to her. She implored him to tell her plainly if there was anything he wished her to do, which she left undone; anything he wished her to leave undone, which she did; implored him, as he valued their peace, the happiness of their love, to let no unexplained, unrecognized influence creep (as she wrote the word creep, Viola again thought of the lithe and crafty Caspian) between them.


By the next mail—no delay this time—came Lionel's answer to that letter. He upbraided Viola with unworthy jealousy! hinted, not over-delicately, that if either of them had cause for jealousy it certainly was not Viola; he reproached her for her past faults towards him, for the unreadiness she had shown to make

any sacrifices for him ; for the way she had set other duty above that to him, for the devotion she was always showing to others—only not to him. If, he finished by saying, it should be that the life of their love should come to a violent, miserable, untimely end, she must take the blame home to herself. She ought now to have been already, for long years, his wife.

Viola could only weep over that letter, and then preserve a half-stunned silence about it. She burnt it, that it never might bear witness against him : the only letter of Lionel's she had ever burnt. She only recognized its wild injustice by the close, minute anxiety with which, when she next wrote, she questioned him about his health—whether he was sure the climate suited him, whether he took care of himself, if he slept enough, and didn't work too hard.

Inevitably and unconsciously, after that outbreak of Lionel's, a tone of constraint grew over Viola's letters. Instead of writing everything, small and great, as it came into her mind, as she had been used to do, she now paused and thought, whether it would be wise to tell Lionel this, whether he would misunderstand that, whether the other would pain him.

There was no doubt Viola told herself that she was an awkward correspondent, that she expressed herself stupidly, that she gave undue



importance to some things by writing so carelessly about everything.

No doubt Lionel had, for a long time, put up with a great deal that pained him. He had not spoken till she had reproached him.

Viola, thinking back, felt sure that her letters must lately have been very trying to him. She had so often written hurriedly: she had written all about things he did not know about, and, because she trusted to him to know all that, she had perhaps said very little of her love for him, her longing for his return.

When she had thought it all over in this spirit, settling the blame well upon herself, she was less unhappy. For there are women who love in such fashion, that to believe themselves to have been wrong towards the beloved, is easy and happy, compared with thinking themselves wronged by the beloved.

Poor Viola was indeed lonely now. She dreaded being alone with her father, lest the subject of Lionel should be touched between them; and she was often for weeks and months, from morning to night, entirely alone with him. Rosie was at school again, Viola felt it selfish to keep her in so sad a home, and Mr. Newnham (for his soul's sake) tried, at this time, to be a good deal absent from the neighbourhood. If he was a great deal absent, the sacrifice he made was not so great

as some time since it would have been ; for Viola's manner was changed towards him, had a constraint, a suppressed impatience, dislike, he thought, that was unspeakably painful. Yet she did not avoid him, she seldom now, unless at her father's direct request, left him alone with Mr. Dalton. Was Viola's nature changing? Was she growing ungenerously, jealously suspicious? Greatly as it tried her to be always alone with her father, it tried her yet more to leave him alone with Mr. Newnham. She believed they talked over her affairs, Lionel's silence, or her sadness, and that they encouraged each other to condemn Lionel.

She tried not to think this ; but, of course, it must be through Mr. Newnham that Mr. Dalton was always so well aware when mails arrived by which she should have heard, and, now and then, if she suddenly returned to the room, their talk broke off, and both the men looked embarrassed.

Viola tried, tried hard, not to be unjust towards Mr. Newnham ; but she felt sure that to her father's always growing affection for him was owing some of his harshness of judgment of Lionel :—and this, of course, was enough to embitter her judgment of Mr. Newnham.

It must have been about a year since little Alma's death, for it was spring again, that Mr.

Dalton, one day, said to Viola,

"My daughter, I am half inclined to write to Lionel myself (Viola's face at this flushed crimson suddenly, with anger; it was Mr. Newnham who was most often Mr. Dalton's secretary), by the next mail, and to forbid *your* writing till he answers *me*. It is most painful to me that things should go on as they do——"

"Papa, what do you mean, by things going on as they do?" Viola questioned, breaking in with angry heat. "What is there to make a fuss about?"

"I mean it is most painful to me that you should go on giving so much, receiving so little. There is a want of dignity, almost of maidenly-ness, my dear——"

But Viola had not the patience to let him finish.

"Who has been talking to you? Why is this fuss made? It is too absurd! If I, an idle girl, choose to write oftener to my lover than I am content to hear from him, who is a man, with his hands full and his head full of a man's work, what is that to anyone—even to you, papa?"

"You choose to speak of it so slightly; perhaps, poor child, you are even able to think lightly of it; but that I don't believe, or why are you so pale, so sad, so thin, so worn-looking, as they say you are?"

"Who says I am all this?"

"Why, everybody says so—my eyes say so, the doctor says so, Nancy says so."

"Papa, it is Mr. Newnham who says so to you. It is very impertinent of him! I will not be pitied by Mr. Newnham, papa. I will not have him coming here, coming between us, poisoning your mind against Lionel. I will not have it, papa."

"Hush! child, hush!"


"Not yet, till I have said more; till I have begged you, papa, as you value my loving duty, do not interfere between me and Lionel. Above all, lay no commands on me with regard to Lionel, for—I—should—not—obey—you, papa, and it would be painful to me to disobey you!"

"It has come to this!"

"No, it has not, because you have yet laid no commands on me. You are wise, you are kind, you will not do it."

"But if I did? You set all duty to me aside, you choose——"

"As if he were already my husband I choose my duty to him first. It is the love between men and women, not just the marriage-service, that gives them claims upon each other. While our love lasts, Lionel's and mine—and it can only end with our lives, papa, and not then, not then, it cannot end—we are first and before all things



each the other's. Let us only be left alone—let there be no meddling, and all will be well.”

“Ah! my daughter, my daughter, I used to regret that, years ago, you two had not married; that I, poor wretched wreck had chained you, Viola; but now, the nature of my regret is changing—I regret that——”

“Papa, stop. Don't let me hear you say what I couldn't forgive you for saying, couldn't forgive my own ears for having heard you say! Who poisons your mind against Lionel? Who makes you so ready, always so ready, to believe the worst of him, and then to judge him as if you knew the worst to be the truth. I, and who else, should know him. And I am content. I believe his love to be as much, as completely mine as it was the day we parted, as it was in that happy spring when we were first engaged. If I am so weak, so silly, as to let every little silence fret me, it is not that I am afraid of—that he loves me less, is leaving off loving me.”

“What you should fear, Viola, is, that in his life and circumstances, there is now something of which he is ashamed: something that makes it difficult to him to write to you, a pure, loving, trusting girl: something——”

“That is what I will *never* fear, papa—never, never, never. Lionel live a life of which he is ashamed!”



She said this with a passionate vehemence that made her gasp for breath before saying more. And in that gasping pause the feeble shrinking figure of her father, his pained and painful eyes, appealed to her irresistibly. She knelt down by him, and taking his hand, said,

“Dear papa, don’t let us speak of Lionel any more till we are able to think more alike about him—till you are able to know how much better than you know him I know him.”

“Or the other way, my poor, poor child—the other way.”

“It will never be the other, papa,” she said, with quiet pride, the softness dying from her face.

She got up and went away.

And then, as with flushed cheeks and excited eyes, she crossed the hall to the stairs, she met Mr. Newnham. At that moment she hated him, thinking—

“Now they will talk it all over. It is too bad of papa—quite too bad; he should know better.”

## CHAPTER II.

## FROM BAD TO WORSE.

WHEN Viola sat alone in her own room, she was almost appalled to remember her father's words—"What you should fear is that there is something in his life and circumstances of which he is ashamed."

Her father would never have spoken such words had he not heard and believed some ill of Lionel, for hearing and believing which he wished to prepare her. To believe that he had heard and believed ill of Lionel, and to believe that in what he had heard and believed there was any truth, were, of course, two different things. It was the first that appalled Viola: the possibility of the second did not occur to her; but that Lionel's name should be made of evil report was terrible to her.

Her father thought that, in speaking of her faith in Lionel, she had protested too much. But, indeed, it was not so: words seemed too weak to indicate her firm trust.

As she sat now and thought about those terrible words of her father's, she perplexed her brain to discover some way in which lying fabrications respecting Lionel might be set circling till the outer ripples should reach even to Orchardleigh. She was not yet madly unjust enough to believe that of any such fabrications Mr. Newnham could be the source; that he was the communicator was cause enough for bitterness against him, and this it seemed to her he must be. The only way in which news of Lionel might reach Mr. Dalton, unknown to Viola, *must* be through Mr. Newnham, she thought.

Augusta Ryeman was now married, and her husband, Major Harper, who was an acquaintance of Mr. Newnham's, was at this time on duty in the island, not far from Lionel's station. It was more than probable that Caspian Lockyear, if still in the island, would sometimes be with Mrs. Harper; something of what Caspian might choose to say about Lionel would, probably, be heard by Major Harper, and might be retailed to Mr. Newnham.

Viola knew that queer reports about Caspian herself were afloat in the neighbourhood. Did her father, she wondered, in anyway associate Lionel with Caspian? If he did, she could hardly blame him for this, when she herself, in her secret

thoughts, had associated Caspian with Lionel's changed tone. Nevertheless, it is absolutely true that Viola's faith in Lionel's faith did not waver. But she began to recognise the possibility, for him, of entanglements, of perplexities, that might, in some mysterious way, against his will (that will, possibly, being less firm to resist than it should have been), spoil his life, destroy her happiness and his. She began to recognise the possibility that a skilfully poisonous tongue might poison his heart against her—make his faith in her faith waver. She tried to look at herself, and the events of her life, from an enemy's point of view, and was startled to find how easy of perversion, how open to misconstruction, much she had said and done might seem.

Things were ill with him! That she not only feared, but seemed to know. The shadows thickened, and the far-off darkness crept up nearer; but Viola did not yet believe that any shadows, any darkness, would ever overcloud and crowd her back from faith in Lionel's love. Therefore, though worn and anxious, she was hardly yet to be counted unhappy. The great necessity she felt was to reassure him as to her own unwavering love and trust and truth.

Viola prayed for Lionel with the wringing both of fleshly and of spiritual hands. She

wrestled for him with the unknown powers of darkness, asking his deliverance from temptations—vague and mysterious temptations—of the flesh and the devil, which she did not understand. She seemed to fight for him with phantoms, which she resisted, conquered, dispersed, only to have them closing round her, or, rather, round his image in her, again.

The time went on. The five years of Lionel's absence was now close upon its expiration, and he made no allusion to his return home. Viola wrote to him, by every opportunity, passionately tender letters. Her whole being was stirred with love and sorrow, and she had no pride of a kind that restrained their expression to him. His letters came more and more seldom. They were shorter and more constrained. She could almost believe that hers were left unread. She could not know that they were as coals of fire, to pour which upon his own head and heart courage failed him. At last she cried out to him, in the anguish of her spirit, with an exceeding bitter cry. To that letter, at least, she had looked to have an immediate answer. None came. Two or three mails were for her blank and silent; then came just an ordinary note, very cold, very hurried, with no answer to that cry of hers, and yet with a sentence in it which seemed to her to imply that it had reached him. Silence settled on

her life ; silence and, it seemed to her, darkness—darkness that she could indeed feel, as she blindly groped about in it. As far as possible all her anxious sorrow should be all her own. There was no one to whom to speak. With the few inhabitants of her small world she was at enmity, because they condemned Lionel. With herself she was at enmity, because it must be chiefly on the showing of her own traitorously sad pale face that they condemned Lionel.

She was always preaching to herself the old story. She was but an idle woman, with an empty life, leaving her leisure for self-torment, leisure to grow fanciful and morbid ; while he was a man, doing a man's work in the world ; possibly absorbed from sunrising to sunset by this work. Conscious of his firm hold upon her love and life, he did not need to be always dragging them out into the daylight to be looked at, talked about. She heeded her own preaching less and less ; it grew always to seem more and more dry-as-dust and inadequate. Till, at last, even that sound ceased : she was silent, even to her own heart.

There came a sort of feeling over Viola that she had done with loving, and could only hate—only not Lionel, never Lionel. Because she could not be blind to the fact that he was good, kind, unselfishly devoted, she more and more

disliked Mr. Newnham. She refrained with difficulty from letting herself actively hate him, with the unreasonable hatred of a suffering woman. She hated herself for her loss of appetite, for her growing thin, for her pale face and her sad look, as she might have hated these things in a rival, who by them hoped to appeal to her lover; but much more she hated that Mr. Newnham's eyes, by their compassionate tenderness, should tell her they saw and grieved over these things. What right had his eyes to be compassionate? Affronting Lionel, insulting her. If, even, Lionel chose to make her suffer, it was his right—she was his; it was nothing to Mr. Newnham. It was impertinent, it was intolerable that Mr. Newnham should thus play the spy upon her! Then, again, what right had any one even to seem to be better than Lionel? Than Lionel, who was all good, all noble, who had Mr. Newnham's goodness, and so many things added thereunto—intellectual power, spiritual experience, the attraction and fascination of genius. Than Lionel, who, in brief, was Lionel!

Poor Mr. Newnham, his senses sharpened by love, was conscious that, for some reason, he was just at this time peculiarly distasteful to Viola. He did not guess how, or why, nor, fortunately, poor fellow, to what extent.

Viola would have laughed at herself for the things she found to dislike in Mr. Newnham, had laughter still seemed possible. The very whiteness of the teeth shown by his frank, kind smile, the brightness of his honest, loving eyes, the warmth and power of his hand-clasp, the hearty ring of all he said, and the clear, rather loud voice in which, for Mr. Dalton's behoof, he said it, the genuine enjoyment in his laugh, when—this was, at least, not too often now—he laughed,—all these harmless pleasant things were causes of offence; but the intolerable things were any signs of special interest in herself, any approach to compassion or anxiety in his look when he looked at her, or in his voice when he spoke to her.

Of course Viola reproached herself for this bad-blooded, unreasonable state of mind, and controlled its expression as far as possible; but it was absolutely needful to her to avoid, as far as possible, coming into contact with Mr. Newnham. Oh! if only they had money, and could go away! she sometimes thought; anywhere that was a change. And then, at last, the silence was broken, and the darkness stirred. There came a letter from Lionel. A letter that almost seemed to Viola as if it challenged her to release him from his engagement. It was a letter different from any she had had from him



for years now—passionate, in love, in jealousy, in mysterious self-accusation and self-depreciation, and yet seeming almost to demand that she should set him and herself free! It spoke much of Mr. Newnham.

“The constant mention of him in your letters, the way in which he evidently is habitual in your life, almost proves that what I hint at is true.

“Don’t think I blame you, Viola, if you have learned to love him. Knowing, as I do, his goodness, his claims upon your gratitude, his long devotion, his true worthiness, where I am most unworthy, I cannot blame you. It is all most natural. It can hardly *not* be. Only, I entreat, be frank with me. If this is indeed so, it may point me a way out of a misery—a miserable way—for, indeed, my life is with you, Viola; but if this is indeed so, it might be best for all of us—best for you to be free of one so unworthy of you; best for me to be free—to be miserable without involving you in my misery; best for—oh! Viola, you will send me the truth?”

To this Viola answered, among other things:

“It is almost as easy to me, Lionel, to think you are weary of me, wish for freedom, are looking for a pretext to throw me off, as to believe that you can seriously suspect that my

heart has turned from you. Oh! Lionel, my heart is burning in me with love, anger, sorrow, but its every hope and thought, its very self is yours—all yours! I don't know what to say. No words seem to me to say anything. But I am yours, all yours, and only yours; and all my struggle where you think I love has been not to hate. Oh! Lionel, if only we could meet! The sorrow of it—of the thought that you could think I did not love you—almost kills me. What have I done or said, or left undone, unsaid, that you could think so—that I could have so pained you? If for one hour we could be together, and look into each other's eyes, I think then all would be well between us—that you would feel all I want you to feel, know all I want you to know of my undivided, undeviating allegiance. Lionel, the five years are over and gone—do you not come home, Lionel—do you not come home?"

It was, as an answer to this, that Lionel wrote to Viola about coming out to him, if he should see well to prolong his time of absence for another five years, as had been proposed to him. This letter was one that utterly bewildered Viola, for it was more like a demand for her refusal than an entreaty for compliance. She did not refuse. She hadn't yet come to doubt his love, or to doubt that his happiness

was with her, as hers with him. She left it all in his hands, making it clear that unless he decided to come home, she certainly would at once go out. She only begged him to consider all things; if, indeed, to begin with, it was well that he should stay longer away from England—if they might not be better and happier, even if poorer, in England. She said nothing of her own difficulties, did not speak of other claims upon her—though, of course, everything would be infinitely difficult, even to finding sufficient money for her journey. As to that, however, she would not have hesitated to ask Lionel to send it to her. She made no difficulties of any kind.

“Rosie is no child now—I could leave my father,” she wrote. “Say ‘come,’ and I come.”

She had a feeling that the happiness of their lives was at stake—that everything should give way to their claims upon each other; that Lionel was struggling in a sea of trouble and temptation, of which she knew nothing; that the time was come when all other duties, all other considerations, must give way to duty to him—to her love for him. She longed that he should say “Come.” She would glory in subduing the difficulties that would beset her. The one point she asked him to consider before deciding—before accepting the prolongation of

his appointment—was whether it was well with him out there, physically and mentally—whether it was well he should prolong his absence from England.

While awaiting his answer, she began quietly, without giving to anyone an unnecessary alarm, to prepare for the *possibility* of departure.

Rosie was to leave school directly, and to undertake, under Nancy, the management of everything. Mr. Dalton was to accustom himself to Rosie. Of course Viola, in contemplating the possibility of leaving her poor old invalid father—in thinking of what it would be to him to part with her—went through a martyrdom of remorseful sort of pain ; but she did not hesitate as to duty, and in this there was infinite comfort. The thought of seeing Lionel gave her secret strength, shed a glory on everything, so that all burdens seemed easy, and troubles light.

Then came Lionel's answer :—

“Do not dream of coming, my darling—I was mad to think of it. For the rest I have decided nothing. I shall write again by the first mail ; then I shall know. If I accept the prolonged appointment, it will be on condition of leave of absence long enough to fetch you. But I don't think this will be. I cannot fancy my Viola here. The place is not fit for you :

the climate is not fit for you : the society is not fit for you. As to your coming here alone, do you think I dreamt of it? It is impossible. Surely one so wise as you could not have dreamt of it? I absolutely forbid you to do it. We might cross each other on the way. I am still utterly undecided about everything."

Viola wrote in answer :—

"Lately, Lionel, you have dwelt so much upon my wisdom, that I wish—how I wish! you could know the foolishness of my intense longing to go to you. But you will come to me? When? How soon? Oh! Lionel, Lionel, my heart is sick; I could die of weariness of longing to see you! Tell me a 'when,' that I may count the days and the hours."

It was here the thread broke; no more knotting and hanging-up interruption. It broke!

"If only there were any tie of kinship between us that should make you look to me for help, I should indeed be thankful!" So Mr. Newnham said one day, with a bitter earnestness. "If only it were, even, natural that you should take from me those things in which I overbound, and feel no necessity to say 'thank you,' even for that, I should be, beyond measure, grateful."

"But there is no such tie! It is not natural."

"And I weary and pain and sometimes anger you?"

"If so, all the fault is mine. You are very good."

There was no softness in Viola's face or voice, no relenting from that hard sort of sufferance which so inexpressibly pained him. She might have said "I hate you" in the same voice in which she said "You are very good," and the words and tone would have harmonized well enough.

He knew she suffered troubles for which there was no help in him, or in any man. But she was also weighed down with cares which his shoulders might have borne, and have felt no burden. It was hard. She was hard. All things seemed hard for all of them. He could, however, only submit. I don't think he, yet, ever had any hope: ever yet said to himself, "My time may come."

## CHAPTER III.

## WHAT THE HARPERS THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

“IF that is a case of courtship, Augusta, it is more disgustingly all on one side, and that the wrong side, than anything I have ever seen, even in these evil and perverse latter days.”

That was Major Harper’s speech to his wife one evening, when Lionel had been with them, while Caspian was staying with them.

“It’s no case of courtship, Harry. They are cousins, after a fashion, and old friends, and she nursed him when he was ill, and she, ever since, considers herself to be something between his nurse and his great-grandmother. It couldn’t be a case of courtship. Lionel has been for years engaged to a Miss Dalton, who is also a sort of a cousin of Caspian’s.”

“Why can’t this girl leave him alone, then? If she goes on as she is doing, I cannot promise to refrain from boxing her ears some day.”

“Oh, Harry, you are such a prude! You are much too hard upon poor Caspian. I do hope

you are not going to quarrel with her just now. She is most useful to me: I don't see how I could get on without her. I am sure I did not see that she paid Lionel any particular attention."

"I should be sorry to quarrel with her just now if, indeed, you find her useful. But I've sometimes fancied that you seemed more afraid of her than fond of her."

"What an idea! I do indeed find her useful."

"I know it would be awkward for you till you have made friends, and I hope more trustworthy friends, of some of the ladies in the island, to be left without her. Can't you, therefore, give her a hint? You can put it all on my prudishness. Tell her I say I shall be obliged to send her home, if she is not more careful in her conduct. Tell her it has been remarked upon, that I have heard her spoken of—not with respect! A girl in her position could not be too guarded in her conduct. I should have said it was Miss Lockyear's nature to be guarded. I don't the least understand her *rôle*, but I wish she was safe at home!"

"She has no home, poor Caspian! Indeed, Harry, she means no harm. Even if she did, it is an absurd piece of Quixotism on your part to interfere between her and Lionel. Both of them are well able to take care of themselves."



"She is. She is a dangerous, designing woman! But as to Beverley—many a fine young fellow's happiness has been ruined by no worse a woman!"

"I can't at all understand what you mean! Caspian seems to me not attractive enough to be dangerous, even if she were designing."

"Her attractions are not of a kind to make themselves apparent to women. She won't make love to you, Augusta, but to me, if to either of us!"

"She had better make love to you!"

"Suppose she has already done so. Suppose next time she does so I give her a little encouragement, poor girl! But, seriously, all joking aside, you may rest assured that this friend of yours is a dangerous person. I would give little for the chances of happiness of any household of which she was to be a permanent member. The sooner you can do without her the better. Her talent for misrepresentation is so enormous that it must be, I think, not talent or habit, but instinct—nature."

"I really can't think there's much harm in poor Caspian."

"You have a good deal to learn, Augusta, I am happy to perceive—and I'm in no hurry that you should learn it—of the wickedness of the world, and, especially of the very especial

wickedness of some of the women in it. Apart from this you are not, it seems to me, naturally observant. I daresay you are quite unaware of a peculiarity in Miss Lockyear's style of dress—what it is I'm not dressmaker enough to say—but the result is that I'm always reminded of Tennyson's description of Vivien's robe which more 'express than hid her.'"

"Caspian has left off wearing crinoline—but so have many ladies; and in this climate we really cannot bundle ourselves up with all the clothes we used to wear in England. It would be absolutely unendurable."

"Of course it would be most ungrateful of me to quarrel with your friend on this ground. It is only kind of her, having so graceful and admirably-proportioned a figure, to give one the opportunity of admiring it."


"I can't endure to hear you talk in that way."

There the dialogue ended; not before Augusta's cheeks were uncomfortably hot. The large and florid Augusta was a coward: she was afraid of Caspian, afraid of certain revelations Caspian might feel called upon to make to Major Harper if she and Augusta quarrelled. She was also afraid of her husband, of his "prudishness;" she knew he would not give much credit to anything he might hear from Caspian, but possibly he would credit it enough

---

to think "there was something in it," and to subject his wife to an uncomfortably close cross-examination.

Augusta's cowardice, therefore, made her anxious to keep on good terms with Caspian. But Augusta was also jealous; she was sensitively alive to the fact that she herself was not now looking her best, and that the soft, lithe flexible grace of Caspian's figure and movements showed her off to the worst possible advantage. She did not enjoy serving as a foil to her friend. Major Harper had said quite enough to put his wife watchfully on the alert—to incline her to a hostile-toned criticism, as he had intended to do. He would not have said quite as much, possibly, if he had fully recognized the extremely inflammable nature of the feelings near which he had dropped a small spark.



## CHAPTER IV.

“WOMEN ARE SO HARD ON WOMEN.”

“**D**EAR Augusta, do you know what I have done to displease your dear husband?”

Caspian, looking up from the work she was doing for her friend—the delicate embroidery of a baby’s frock—as she and Augusta sat alone together the next morning, asked this question in the most mournfully pathetic tone of her expressive voice, adding—

“He used at first to be so kind to me, so very kind—quite affectionate and brotherly; now he treats me so differently, so strangely, quite as if he disliked me. What have I done to displease him? I have been thinking and thinking, but I can’t find out. It makes me very unhappy!”

At this over-much show of feeling, foolish Augusta’s too ready colour rose. She was too simple to know that had Caspian felt what her tone and look professed, she would not have let them so profess. Augusta remembered too

that the house, all doors and windows and lattice-work and persiani, was a dangerous house to talk in, if you did not wish to be overheard. Had Caspian overheard what had been said the previous evening? Caspian being one of those women, all eyes and ears, whom few things escape, this was not unlikely. Augusta answered, in a manner that did not soften the offensiveness of the matter,

“I don’t see, Caspian, that you need trouble yourself so much about the liking or disliking of other people’s ‘dear husbands;’ what you have to do is so to conduct yourself that you shall be respected. But if you wish to know what it is in you that Major Harper especially disapproves, I will tell you. He thinks you flirt shamelessly with Lionel!”

“And does he prefer that, if I flirt at all, I should flirt only with Major Harper?” asked Caspian, with a mock-innocent air. Her cool blood was stirred by Augusta’s words and manner. “At one time he seemed to wish that I should do that.” Then, altering her tone to one of serious sadness, before Augusta could reply, she said, “Is it not natural, Augusta, that so lonely a creature as I am should care to be liked by my friend’s husband?—by my host? But this is not all—you yourself must see that it is not consistent with proper womanly self-

---

respect that I should remain in a house the master of which treats me with open dislike, contempt, and disrespect."

"Major Harper does nothing so ungentlemanly—you know he does not. If you pretend he does, it must be because you are wanting a pretext upon which to leave me. I don't pretend to understand you, Caspian; but I can see as far as that before my nose!"

"And, when I leave you, what do you suppose is to become of me?"

"I can't pretend to know, but I believe you know, or you would never have taken up that tone! But, indeed, Caspian, if you wish to be treated with respect, you must be more careful in your conduct. Of course I defended you to Major Harper—but, really, it is not fair to Viola Dalton that you should go on as you do with Lionel."

Caspian had expected to frighten Augusta by her threat of desertion, to reduce her to complete submission. She had not expected this sort of answer: she understood that jealousy must be at work. After a moment's pause, she said,

"You have not explained to Major Harper, I am afraid, dear Augusta, the relationship and old, old friendship between Lionel and myself, which justifies our intimacy, any more than you

explained to him the little episode in your life, when, by-the-by, *you* were not quite careful in *your* conduct, which first made us, you and I, such closely confidential friends."

"Major Harper does not consider that anything can justify your *kind* of intimacy. I cannot dictate to Major Harper how he is to treat you, nor what view he is to take of your behaviour. Still less, of course, Caspian, can I ask you to remain with us, if you are not comfortable, under our roof. As for your implied threat, I understand it—I will be beforehand with you. Major Harper does not incline to implicit faith in your truthfulness!"

"Somebody must have interfered, somebody has made mischief between us. Major Harper did like me so very well." Caspian covered her face a moment, and sobbed. "At one time, indeed," she added, still sobbing, "I was only afraid that I should be obliged to tell you, Augusta, that he liked me too well."

It was the malice in her, not the craft that *would* say this. She took away her handkerchief, lifted her full white lids, which showed few signs of tears, and looked full at Augusta as she said it.

Augusta, though crimson, was unusually composed.

"I candidly believe that nothing but a further

acquaintance with you, and a closer observation of your conduct, has changed my husband's feelings towards you, Caspian. Men see and understand things that women often do not see, often—if they see, do not understand."

"Dear Augusta," Caspian looked in Augusta's flushed face a moment, then asked with affectionate frankness, "Does it not all resolve itself into this, that you are jealous?"

"Of my husband's dislike of you? No, you are welcome to that, Caspian, quite welcome.—But really, Caspian, speaking seriously and as your friend, all bitter joking aside, you had better be careful. You know that when you came here the being received into a respectable house was quite necessary to you, because of the rash way you had acted; we did not think you had been more than rash, we believed you had been unfortunate, and that you had been unjustly treated, therefore we received you here."

("You received me here because you saw I should be useful to you," was Caspian's aside.)

"Don't, now, jeopardize your chances of remaining here till you have something else in view, either by temper or imprudence. For, indeed, if just now, you left us, I don't see, unless you choose to return to your father, what



could become of you. You are not, I suppose, proposing to keep house for Lionel?"

And so saying, with a matronly dignity and rustle of silk, Mrs. Harper swept away before Caspian had answered her.

"How I could make you repent this, if it were worth my while—if it suited my other schemes," Caspian said, as she looked after her. Left alone, Caspian sat still, and diligently went on with her delicate embroidery; as diligently with certain subtle intricacies of scheming.

Presently she became aware that Major Harper was in the room. She gave no sign of being aware of this; she bent lower over her work: she paused to raise her handkerchief to her eyes; she sobbed a little suppressed sob. Caspian was enough of an artist to indulge, often, in a little bit of dramatic by-play for the mere love of it. She did not always, and undeviatingly, have one great aim in view, and never step aside from what she believed to be the road towards its attainment. She needed, and allowed herself occasional relaxation.

When Major Harper spoke, she started and looked up. Such a meek, sad, maidenly, martyred expression upon her face.

"Alone! Miss Lockyear. Where is my wife?"

"She has just left the room, Major Harper."

Major Harper was about to do the same; but

he felt as if it would be brutal not to say one kind word.

"You seem out of spirits," seeing that she was crying, and must see that he saw she was crying. "Is anything troubling you?" He came nearer as he spoke.

She raised her eyes and looked into his, as he stood before her. It was a look that accused him of treachery, of cruelty, but in the meekest and most resigned manner. The look said plainly—

"Trample on me, I am alone, unprotected, I have no friends, no one to avenge me! Trample on me!"

In that look there was subtle bewitchment, and flattering appeal. Major Harper began to wonder whether, indeed, some feeling of slighted vanity might not a little have embittered his remarks to his wife about Caspian. He had not seen so much harm in her when her blandishments were all for him. Caspian had, at one time, since she had lived with them, during an illness of his wife's, made so much of him! Now, since they had come to Lionel's station, he found himself an object of perfect indifference to Miss Lockyear. He repeated his question, as to the cause of her low spirits.

"I have cause to be out of spirits," she said in words. "I find myself misunderstood, harsh-

ly judged, suspicion thrown upon my relationship towards one I find to be my one only friend! The friend of my childhood, the only relative I have whom I need not be ashamed to own. I feel the world a hard place for a lonely woman, Major Harper. I have no prospects but painful ones. I don't know what can become of me. Every hand seems to be against me—even yours, which I thought was kind!"

She put her slight white hands before her face for a moment, and her shoulders heaved.

"Miss Lockyear, why didn't you stay at home with your own people," he asked brusquely, perhaps hoping, by the brusqueness, to save a scene. "The world is apt to be a hard place for women who break away from their proper moorings, and toss about in it alone. Surely you have some dash (he had been about to say "of the adventuress," but refrained) of the love of adventure in you, or you would not have broken away from your natural protectors—changing, as I hear, even your name, that they might not reclaim you."

"Do you know the position, the character, the history of my 'natural protectors?'" Caspian's eyes flashed out of her pale face—a face of indignant virtue.

"I know nothing about them, or you."

"Then you are, of course, in a position to pro-

nounce upon my duties, and to judge my actions."

"No need to be so scornful, young lady."

"Scornful! I feel as if no woman's heart could hold scorn enough of the tyranny, the harshness, the cruelty, the injustice, that tramples upon the weak, and holds the unprotected up to contempt——But, I must restrain myself! I am as yet your guest, you my host. A generous, kind-judging, chivalrous host—a host fit to be the keeper of the tender conscience of a lonely, deserted girl. It was this I really thought you, this you really were to me, till your mind was poisoned against me, by, I can only suppose, a woman's jealousy and spite. Women are so hard upon women, Major Harper!"

Caspian rose to leave the room.

"One moment, Miss Lockyear; too much has been said, or too little."

"I cannot wait now, my nerves are shaken. Mrs. Harper might come in. I cannot run the risk of jealous insult from your wife, Major Harper, a second time in one day."

In spite of a detaining hand laid upon her arm, Caspian broke away; outraged modesty and indignation, at once fierce and stately, was expressed both by her face and movement.

Major Harper was left feeling amazingly uncomfortable; quite in the wrong; inclined to be

angry both with his wife and with himself; inclined to think that she had jealously stirred him up to dislike of her friend. Inclined, also, to think that his own conduct had been inexcusably harsh and unchivalrous.

"I wish I had myself remonstrated with her, in a brotherly fashion," he said; "women are so hard upon women."

It could hardly have been Caspian's words that had produced this impression. It was done by her eyes, by her tones, by her gestures. The way in which she had left the room would almost alone have been sufficient. Major Harper did the worst thing he could have done if he wished to re-establish peace between his wife and Caspian—he told his wife that he believed, after all, he had spoken and judged somewhat harshly—that there was a something about her friend—a certain dignity and quiet grace, inconsistent with her being what he had pronounced her—that he had had a few words with her, and——"

"And she has come round you, has she? Well?"

In that "well," and in the tapping of the foot upon the ground that accompanied it, there was a world of meaning. And after this Augusta watched Caspian with a jealous mistrustfulness that lay in wait for a definite fault of conduct upon which to pounce. But Augusta

knew little of Caspian if she expected to find her out in any fault in which it did not suit Caspian to be found out.

For the next few days Caspian went about with an air of injured queenhood, and often wept; and Major Harper thought, again and again, how hard women were to women, and was sorry he had said a word against Caspian to his wife; or, rather, a word to rouse his wife's jealousy of Caspian; and he was almost angry with his wife for the hard unthankful way in which she received Caspian's gentle services, and was himself kinder to Caspian than he had been for a long time, so that Augusta became desperately anxious to be rid of Caspian soon. And so things went on till such time as it suited Caspian to bring about a crisis.

## CHAPTER V.

## HOW IT WAS WITH LIONEL.

“**W**HERE is Mrs. Harper?” was Lionel’s first question on entering Mrs. Harper’s drawing-room, and finding Caspian there alone.

“She has driven out this evening, Lionel. It was too hot till now.”

Caspian spoke apologetically, standing before him in a drooping, dejected manner.

“Then why did you just now ask me to come? Is this the prudence you promised, Caspian? You act always as if you wished to compromise both yourself and me!”

“Lionel, I needed to see you alone. I am in great trouble. I have no one to whom to turn. What was I to do?” She pressed her hands together with an appealing gesture; and her face was one of pale, wide-eyed appeal.

“You will always be in ‘great trouble’ if you are so imprudent. You tell me that you are watched, suspected; that everything you do is harshly misjudged; that our . . . friendship, or

whatever it is, is misinterpreted; that your intimacy with me is misconstrued, and your character damaged by this misconstruction; and on an evening when your friend is out, you send for me. I have no patience with what, if it is nothing worse, is childish want of——No, I will not stay.”

He had taken his hat in his hand and was leaving the room. A glitter came into her eyes. She sprang to his side, a truly feline spring, and laid her hand upon his arm.

“If you will not stay and listen to me here, I will go to your house, and you shall listen to me there. For indeed, Lionel, I am desperate!”

Looking her in the eyes, he believed her—to some extent.

“If you choose to do so, Caspian, the consequences shall be upon your own head. I will not stand that tone. Hear me, once for all.” He followed her back into the room as he spoke. “There has been nothing in my conduct towards you that can justify the tone you have lately assumed! Nothing that has given you the right to assume it, or laid on me the obligation to submit to it. Nothing! I have been weak, credulous, unwise——”

She interrupted him; this would not do!

“Oh, Lionel, forgive me,” she said, with coaxing softness, looking into his face caressingly.



“The truth is, I am desperately miserable, and hardly know what I do or say. Don’t go away, things have gone too far for such a trifle as your being here this evening to make any difference. Just listen to me, and tell me what to do. First of all, it is impossible I should stay here any longer. Augusta is jealous, and insults me—insults me beyond endurance, though practice has taught me to endure much! This morning I went about that situation you spoke of, and I was plainly told that—that my character was not blameless enough to make me eligible—that I might be all very well, but that a young woman who had been talked about as I had been talked about, and so on—Lionel, what is to become of me?” She pressed her hands together, palm to palm, and fixed wide, terror-full eyes on Lionel’s face: her face was very white. “I used to fancy I was reckless, but, somehow, now I am near the gulf and see it yawning for me, and look down into the blackness, I am frightened. There are things so much worse than death! Of death I don’t believe I should be afraid; but before this unknown yawning blackness I am a coward! You remember,” she went on, after a pause, finding he did not speak, “what I once told you of my mother? I have no reason to believe that she is dead. At different times, in different

places, I have shuddered to meet a pair of eyes that, somehow, seemed to me hers, and ready to claim possession of me. At night, now, I am always meeting those eyes, and feeling the clutch of long cruel fingers on my shoulder. I am coming to have a feeling that the end will be that I shall shelter myself from intolerable loneliness, and from unbearable scorn, with my mother—shall be taught by her to live her life, shall be dragged down into—” She stopped, shuddered, put her fingers before her face—and so continued for a moment; then, withdrawing those fingers, lifted her white lids, and let her long glittering eyes rest upon Lionel’s. “Is it wonderful I am somewhat wild, haunted by thoughts so horrible?—thoughts to drive any woman mad?—thoughts to which the fear of hell is nothing?”

Her eyes drew Lionel’s thoughts out of the channel in which they had been running. Alas! he was now used enough to Caspian to be able to listen to her words and all the while think his own thoughts; but her eyes were a power—when he met them his mood changed. He had been contemplating the daintily-dressed figure, the delicate neatness of all its appointments, the satin-smooth hair, the fantastic-slippered little foot, escaping from beneath the white skirt, the morsel of embroidery lying on the

ground beside her, where it had fallen when she rose, and wondering what of all she said was real; but in the eyes there was a glitter of desperation that gave reality to what she had said. She might not be desperate, as she said; but in some way she was surely desperate. Nevertheless he answered, sternly and warily,

“Come, Caspian, you know there is in all this a monstrous amount of rant, of exaggeration, and of untruth. I will, if I can, refrain from reproaching you with having brought upon yourself, by your own imprudence (and yet, Caspian, it is not your nature to be imprudent)” —she quailed a little before the look accompanying these words—“whatever is true of all you are lamenting. I remind you, as I have done before, that you know there is a sufficient shelter and protection open to you in the future. One way or another, at home or abroad, Viola will now soon, very soon, be my wife; you can, at the worst, have a home with us till something else offers. The gossip of a few ill-natured women will not follow you to the other side of the world.”

“A home with your wife! To be protected, patronized by your wife, after all that has passed between you and me!”

“Nothing has passed between you and me which is incompatible with this; nothing has

passed between you and me with which I shall not, sooner or later, acquaint Viola to the least detail. I don't say nothing has passed of which I, as Viola's promised husband, have not cause to be ashamed ; but nothing that, loving each other as we do, will or shall separate us." Lionel spoke vehemently, adding softly, as if to himself, "Nothing my darling will not forgive."

Caspian felt she had to-day begun with Lionel in the wrong manner—she had been too abruptly violent ; but temper drove her to say,

"It will make the prospect of living under your wife's protection so much the pleasanter, that she will know how you have befooled me!"

"If either of us has been befooled, Caspian, it is not you ; and that you know."

"However," Caspian continued, as if she had not heard him, "there is no prospect for me in that direction. Viola will never be your wife—never! Viola has been eloquent, doubtless, always, in speaking of love and devotion ; but it seems to me there has been, in her actions, a singular falling short from her professions. She has let you, year after year, lead a lonely, hard-working life, she has let you struggle through illness and all sorts of difficulty, while she has lived softly in the sweet old country home of which she is so fond, with the indulgent father

whose idol she is. I understand this now. Now that you have achieved a certain position and success, probably she might have condescended to share them ; but even if so, all would have had to be conventionally proper and easy. For instance, write and ask her to come out to you, telling her you have suffered and toiled and waited long enough—would she come, do you think ?”

“I don’t think—I know.”

“Try her—I only say try her.”

“I have tried her, Caspian—at this moment she holds herself ready to come. I have only to say ‘come,’ and she comes.”

“She tells you so ? How clever she is ! How well she knows you. I did not think Viola was clever.”

Caspian’s face was inimitable in the way it then expressed utter incredulity and delighted admiration.

“If indeed she had hesitated to come, it would have been for no such reasons as you suppose. I don’t stay here now to hear you talk of Viola—speak of yourself if you have anything to say, and let me go.”

“Oh ! no, it would all have been duty, self-sacrifice, self-denial. Her father’s state of health ; her sister’s need of her protecting care. Oh ! I know, a woman is no woman who cannot find a

reason for not doing what she does not want to do. I don't think it is quite usual for girls who love their lovers to be quite so devoted to their fathers—to be ready to wait till their fathers die of good old age before they marry their lovers!" Suddenly she changed her tone to one of vehement indignation—"I have no patience with Viola," she cried, nor, indeed, with you, for being duped by her. The only excuse for you is, that half I know you do not know. While I could I always defended Viola. I always thought her good. Good indeed! She is slothful, cowardly, cold, calculating, false! I used to wish to be good like Viola. Now I say, defend me from goodness, if that is goodness! Let me still be capable of passion, of self-forgetfulness; not like Viola, absorbed in self-contemplation, in self-complacent simpering selfishness, which she calls duty and saintliness. No, I am not good, but I have proved myself more than once to be ready to risk for you what a woman should hold dearer than life—a poor saying that, however, when life is worth no more than my life! To risk, I might more truly say to lose. Lionel, your trust in Viola is worse than foolish, it is unmanly, base, despicable! If she loved you she could not act as she does! There is a counteracting influence at work. Either she does not know

what love is, or she loves someone else. It is the last that is true.● I know it. I have long suspected it. I know it now! I have long known more than you have known. I have means of getting information of which you know nothing. I didn't tell you half I knew, for dread of grieving you. Those hints I've now and then dropped, for which you have been so angry with me, have so reviled me, giving me to understand that my lips were too unholy to speak your sweet saint's name, were meant to prepare you for hearing all the truth. But more of it than you chose to own I couldn't think but you must suspect. Surely you were not such a fool as to think that a young, wealthy, handsome man like Mr. Newnham would spend year after year of the best years of his life, in befriending an old man, in waiting upon him like a son, tending him almost like a nurse, if it were only a quite hopeless love that he had for the old man's daughter? Mr. Newnham is good, I grant you, good and unselfish; but not a fool, even if you are—not an angel, even if Viola thinks him one."

"Have you finished now?" asked Lionel, coldly. "I forebore to interrupt you. A little more or less made no difference, you had long gone beyond the possibility of forgiveness. How many times when, after listening to your ac-

cursed tongue, I have left you, I have sworn to myself that it should be the last time; but you have lured me back. That is over now. To-day your tongue has lost its cunning. If only it had sooner revealed itself. If only you had as completely dropped the mask before. But it is not now too late!"

"Happy me if, indeed, as I mean it, you had left me for the last time!"

She looked into his face with glowing eyes, choosing to ignore all he had said, but those words upon which she put a perverted interpretation.

"Happy I if, indeed, as I meant them, I had acted on those words. But it is not too late. Yours is an accursed tongue, Caspian, dropping poison, sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet, but always poison, into a man's life. But your work is not yet completed—there is some wholesome place still left in my heart. Even for you it had been better if I had long since seen you, as I hope I see you now, heard you as I hope I hear you now, for the last time. Say to me now anything you have to say of yourself—ask anything you have to ask for yourself. For it will be long, I trust, before we meet again."

She looked into his face still, but she did not speak, the glow was dying out of her eyes.



"Speak, Caspian, if you have anything to ask!"

She was silent, stony still and silent.

"Of course I will do for you, arrange for you, anything I can before I go. The gossip of a few women is not the voice of the world. You know that your show of desperation is absurd. At the worst (or best) a morbid exaggeration."

He waited; still silence.

"Well, Caspian, as you will not speak, you may write to me anything you may wish me to do for you. I cannot stay any longer to be gorgonized by your stony stare."

He was going. If he went now, so, all was lost! She was sitting, almost at his feet, on a low ottoman. As he moved she threw herself forward, on the floor, flung her arms round his feet, and cried,

"You shall not go so, you shall not desert me. Trample on me! Kill me that way, but don't desert me!"

He was her prisoner; he looked down on the uplifted white face, looked into her eyes aglow again and desperate, saw the palpitating passion of the lithe white thing, and, at last, began to be almost afraid—afraid that in all this there was too much reality.

He thought of Viola as a good Catholic in peril might think of his patron saint.

He stooped, and, with as little violence as possible, he unclasped her hands from round him, lifted her from the floor, and put her back upon the ottoman.

“If you will exercise a decent amount of self-control, I will stay yet a few more moments to listen to you!” he said—“to hear if there is any reasonable, possible thing that I can do to help you; but if you are intending to favour me with any more of this mad theatrical behaviour, I warn you that I will not stand it.”

To this she made no reply.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A DECLARATION.

“**W**HAT is it, Caspian, that, by all this show of frenzied desperation, you are hoping to goad me on to do?” he demanded, when still she kept silence.

Still she did not speak: crouching where he had put her, looking as much as possible like a bundle that had been carelessly flung down, as little as possible like the daintily-elegant, graceful girl who had stood waiting to receive him, she gazed up into his face with what he felt to be intolerable eyes; but in his she found no sign of warmth, or of relenting. His face was cold and hard. Harassed, but gloomily stern, with a resentful sort of gloom.

“Cold, cruel—you kill me!” she shuddered. She drooped her white lids over her eyes at last—drooped her white face down on to her knees, shuddered again convulsively, and gave a little cry, that, in spite of him—spite of the incredulity as to her genuineness to which he tried to cling, seemed to pierce to his marrow.

---

Looking at her drooping, crouching form, he thought of her as the poison-scented white flower of that tropical climate, exhaling fumes that, as he was conscious, dimmed and obscured his moral sight to the loveliness, physical and spiritual, of the true flower of his life, but did not yet blind him.

"Caspian, how long am I to wait? I am trying to be patient, but my patience has bounds."

No answer, so he went on—

"I can tell you, Caspian, what it is you will goad me on to do—I can tell you what it is will happen, if you will not be wise in time, give up your madwoman's *rôle*, and be the sensible self-controlled girl you still have it in your power to be. Shall I tell you?"

She only shuddered, shuddering this time most genuinely, at his icy iron tone: but he was conscious that she listened intently.

"If possibly," he said, "you, by skill, by cunning, by fraud, by lying misrepresentation, should succeed in spoiling my life and Viola's, in establishing the show of a claim upon me to which, in pity for you, or in contempt for me, she should yield—I again repeat that I have erred towards you in no way that demands such sacrifice—but should you succeed in this, afterwards, you would gain as your portion, come

into as your inheritance, what? I will tell you what—my hatred. I should then indeed hate you, Caspian, if ever a man hated a woman (and there have been men who hated women, and women who were hated by men), I should hate you, Caspian.”

A pause.

“On the day, should it ever come, when I find myself, through you, separated from Viola, I shall hate you, Caspian. You know now what it is you work for—what it is there is for you to win! It would have been wiser and kinder had I spoken as plainly long ago. But how should I, knowing you to know all you knew of the depth and the tenderness of my love for my pure one, my sweet one, my true one, think you could dream of this?”

Caspian thrilled with the thrill of his voice as he spoke of Viola. She now slowly lifted up her head, and fixed wild eyes, that seemed to lengthen rather than to widen, on him. His eyes, as they met hers, were full of angry gloom, the stern fold on his forehead was heavy—he looked as if he had fully meant his words—and yet his threat of hate was, evidently, no idle threat. A premonition of triumph, sharp and keen, went through Caspian’s heart.

“On the day when I find myself, through you, separated from Viola.”

---

He was feeling then that such a day might come.

Let it but come, and for all that might come after she would suffice to care! So she blasphemed to her own heart. Then, after she had looked a long moment into his eyes, with again that despairing cry, only this time more distinct, more harrowingly prolonged and seeming to carry along on it some words, of which he caught only these—"Hate!—and from you to me!" She again drooped her head upon her knees, this time in no show of silent sorrow; she sobbed and cried as he had never seen or heard child or woman sob and cry.

Those were unwise words he had spoken. He had spoken as he could only excuse himself for speaking by deciding that his very worst estimate of Caspian was the true estimate. When she sobbed and cried so he could not so decide. Something like remorse rose in him: a feeling of necessity to make some atonement. And yet, in different form, he repeated the same words—

"Yes, Caspian, it is true—quite true. Every step you lead me to take along a road it is treasonable to Viola that I should tread, is a step taken towards that end, brings me nearer to feeling towards you as I have said." He so far spared her that he did not repeat the word.

"That is not what either of us desire. Be wise, therefore, Caspian. Let me help you to make the best of your life, without ruining and maiming my own and Viola's. There are many ways, through friends, money, influence, in which we, Viola and I, can help you. You know, you must know, that all this show of desperation and despair is absurdly disproportionate to the circumstances. You know, you must know, that if you cannot establish yourself here as you could wish, you have only to return to England. You have friends enough there always willing and ready to receive you."

"Not now, not now!" she wailed out.

"And why not now? If even that is true of your own especial friends, there are others, there is my step-mother, there is Mrs. Althaus, there is Viola's father."

"They would not have me now—not now!" She glanced up, saying this.

"Why so?"

"They have been taught to believe——"

She hid her face again. A glow crossed Lionel's forehead. There was none on hers.

"They have been taught to believe what?"

"I cannot say it."

"You must."

"They have been taught to believe, then, Lionel, that I have lived with you, and travelled

with you, as your mistress, and that only as your wife can I ever look the world in the face again."

She hurled those words at him, and then crouched lower—broke into the wildest hysterical violence of weeping.

"Let her cry!" he said to himself. "She deserves to be made to cry bitterest tears of shame and penitence. But there is in her neither shame nor penitence!"

He glowed with indignation. He did not believe that what she said was true; he was outraged and exasperated at her shamelessness in saying it.

"It is a lie!" he told her. "A lie that anyone believes this; or if, indeed, there is anyone to believe it, it could only have been on your own shameless showing."

He almost thought he would go now, would leave her as she was. To desist from crying, or from feigning to cry, when it should seem good to her to do so. If only he had! He got to the door, but there he paused and looked back—as she knew he would. She was a woman, as was Viola, or, at least, she sobbed and cried so like one, as to make his heart uneasy! He asked himself what right he had to assume as true the very worst of her? What had he received from her but kindness and de-



votion, even in far-back days, when no thought of separating him from Viola (even if now she harboured such a thought) could have been in her mind? He had been too stern. He had dealt too heavy a blow. His last words had been brutal. Even if she were shameless, he should not have been brutal. And was it shamelessness? Was it not rather desperation? Must it not be that she believed the truth of what she had said, and by the desperation so induced had been impelled to say it? He knew that Mrs. Beverley could be coarse and violent. It might be true that she had written something implying this belief. Possibly there had this day been a quarrel between Augusta and Caspian (he had long thought one was impending), and Augusta had repeated to Caspian her mother's coarse accusations. He said aloud, and she recognized the softened tone,

“Or if it is not a lie that anyone believes this, a little courage, patience, truth-speaking, and truth-acting would soon discredit so wild and monstrous an invention. Who, for instance, could credit it, if you were known to be under Viola's, my wife's, protection?”

Caspian sobbed and moaned on. Lionel grew more and more uneasy. He spoke to her, not tenderly as yet, but scolding her childishness. She did not seem to hear; he felt as if the way

she was grieving must shake her whole system in a manner to endanger life. He knew little of women. Caspian bewildered him directly he began to doubt and reason concerning her: though he was right and safe enough, ordinarily, when he only felt. He did not discriminate between two different things (different, if one may dare to say so, as heaven and hell) which pass often by the same name, between which it sometimes seems as if no intelligence lower than that of the angels sufficed to discriminate. The difference between a woman who loves so unselfishly and so absolutely, who is so absorbed and resolved into love, as it were, that nothing in the world remains to her but her love and her beloved, which, though two, seem one—who, for his happiness, in her short-seeing, yet glorious devotion, counts nothing a sacrifice, withholds nothing, in fact, has lost the power to be anything except in and through him—between such a woman, and such a love, and such a recklessness, and a woman who, even in love loves self first, who is only reckless for the gratification of her own passions, for the securing of her own ends, the realization of her own desires.

If at all reckless, it was only in this latter way that Caspian could ever be reckless. It had been passion, not love, that she had always

appealed to in Lionel. She knew he could not love her; that he loved Viola, deeply and fondly. She had never made any effort to be good, hardly to seem good, in order to awaken esteemful affection. She knew that she could bring him no happiness. She knew she could bring Viola misery. It was, of course, entirely self-gratification (into her calculations entered hatred and jealousy) she sought in the game of reckless daring she played with Lionel. And what self-gratification! She knew the truth of those terrible words he had spoken. She believed that he would, at all events for a time, hate her if she separated him from Viola. And yet she was not daunted, not inclined to go back, or, at least, told herself that it was too late to go back, that she had so far committed herself as to be unable to withdraw. And, indeed, in all probability she was frightened for her own future, frightened as to how far she had really irretrievably damaged her character and prospects by the studied imprudence of her conduct. Caspian valued her fair name and the good repute of the world, for without these things there was no easy living in the world; and there was more truth than she had wished there should be in what she had told Lionel. She had been, of late, growing more and more in earnest, more and more near upon being

really desperate. She had not been so much always under her own control as she would have wished to be. Her fascination was altogether of an evil kind, and yet it was not altogether to things evil in Lionel that she appealed. She had claims, or the show of claims, both on his gratitude and on his pity, and of these she had made skilful use.

## CHAPTER VII.

## AT BAY.

CASPIAN sobbed on. There grew to be something of concern, of tenderness, of entreaty in the voice in which Lionel spoke to her. At last he laid a kind hand on her shoulder. This seemed to rouse her to a new sort of frenzy—in fact, he was alarmed at her hysterical violence. If only he could have known that the sure way to check it would have been to leave her to indulge it without a spectator. She shook off his hand, and sprang up. She confronted him with indignant eyes. It was wonderful how little she was disfigured by such crying. She poured out such a torrent of indignant speech, that he was confounded. She declared herself outraged by him beyond the possibility of regaining self-respect—of ever being able to look him or the world in the face again. She declared that he had made life to her impossible—that he had spoken to her as no other man would have spoken, except to the

---

vilest among vile women—that now nothing, indeed, save to die, remained to her! She seemed so shaken by her own passion, that it was impossible to doubt its genuineness. Indeed, it was genuine passion, though not passion of the kind she wished it to be taken to be. It was not despair; it was desperation dashed with a desperate hope of triumph.

What chance has a man—any ordinary man—what with his goodness, what with his badness, what with his strength, what with his weakness, what with his chivalry, what with his vanity, against a thoroughly determined and an unscrupulous woman—a reckless woman—a woman armed with tears, with sobs, with sighs, with that overpowering torrent of resistless, impetuous eloquence—eloquence of tongue, of eyes, of gesture, with which only women, and only women, when passion stirs the depths in them—depths of good or evil—are gifted?

Lionel had never been so assailed. The storm beat about him, seeming to bruise, and half to stun him—entirely, for the time, to bewilder him. Knowing as false almost everything she said, he yet, while she said it, felt as if it must be in some sort true. That he alone had been to blame for all, she told him, that her only fault and folly had been one—the loving

him—loving him unselfishly, self-sacrificingly, patiently, proudly, gloriously; loving him without hinting her love—without asking or hoping for return of love while she could believe Viola to be in any sort worthy of him—to any extent good or true. That even to this her one fault and folly of loving him, she had not, she declared, been unprovoked; he, step by step, had tempted her on. He had loved her, Caspian, first, before he had loved Viola; he had deserted her for Viola, had been tempted from her by Viola. She, deserted, had nevertheless loved on, always faithful, though he had proved faithless—faithful to her one, first, only love; living only to serve him, ready to nurse him in illness, to comfort him in trouble, thinking never of herself, her name, or fame, but always of him, his good. All this, and more, she told him, and so told him that she half—perhaps more than half—persuaded him, not, perhaps, that it was true, but that she believed it to be true.

Lionel was still young, even in years; he was free from any experience that would have helped him now. This exhibition of Caspian's was a revelation to him, and a bewilderment. She carried him along the white-hot lava torrent of her indignant, glowing, despairing, desperate eloquence, confusing, for the moment, all his ideas. If only he could have been older in

heart and head!—if he could have listened unmoved, or showing no sign of being moved, and could, when all was over, have commented with some cold, cynical incredulous comment, that should have shown his unbelief in her belief in what she said! If only he could, at the moment, have felt what he knew, even at that moment, and felt also, a few minutes after, that all this, except the anger, was false as false! But he found no wise, fit word to say, and the storm rattled on about his ears with unabating, nay, with growing violence. That Viola loved Mr. Newnham, she told him; that Viola did not love him, had long ceased to love him, that she clung still to him from a sense of duty, of propriety, of consistency; that she, Caspian, had loved him, Lionel, with every thought and hope of her mind, every pulse of her being, ever since she could remember; that he had given her, even lately, cause to believe he loved her, and desired her love; that now her only chance of even life being in his hands, and he having outraged her with the name of liar, and the promise of his hate, nothing remained to her but to die,—all this, and more, enunciated with such a white heat of eloquence, ended with her declaring, in a voice that rose almost to a shriek, and filled him with an agony of dread lest, outside that many-doored and win-



dowed house, of which every door and window was now set open to let out the day's sultry heat, and to let in the sea-breeze rising at evening, and sweeping in over gardens of spicy perfumes, she should be overheard—"I will not live!—I will not!—I will die!—I will die!"

Almost shrieking this, she once more fell upon the ground at his feet—once more she clasped his feet; she cried for him to trample upon her, to set his foot upon her neck as he had set it upon her heart, to trample out her body's life as he had her soul's! She knew it was "now or never" that the game must be played out, or it was broken off for always. But, besides this, it is probable that her self-induced hysterical passion had by this time risen beyond her control. She kissed his feet, and wound her arms about them; she laid her face down on them, then kissed them again. Then she raised herself a little, and seized his hand; hanging to his hand, she looked up into his face.

"For Heaven's sake, Caspian, control yourself!" he cried, and he tried to raise her.

With streaming eyes fixed on his, she said,

"I will try—I will be quiet. Forgive me, Lionel!—oh! Lionel, forgive me! It was all true, but I should not have said it. I should have died with it all unsaid. Forgive me, Lionel, before I die! Lionel, Lionel, speak to

---

me!—say you forgive me! Lionel! Lionel! Lionel!”

The music of her voice in saying, or rather in wailing “Lionel,” was something wonderful; and the writhing, wringing clasp of her fingers on his hand seemed a true thing. The eyes with which Lionel looked down upon her must have moved her to pity, to relenting, had she loved him with anything worthy to be called love. There was—I know not what in them—of dumb, helpless, passive misery, of endured torture, a something which only women can make men feel. Against pain inflicted by man against man, men re-act; but perhaps only God, and those men’s own hearts, know what men, sometimes, have to suffer at the hands of women—women who bind them hand and foot before they torture. What women suffer from the much-talked-of cruelty of men can be as nothing to it.

Caspian was pitiless—a coward at bay, and pitiless; a cold and cruel-hearted woman, who had set her all upon loss or gain. She kept wailing on for forgiveness; she kept wringing that hand. She let him now succeed in raising her.

“For Heaven’s sake, peace!” he said. “Is the whole world to know what is passing between us?”

"It is only this one last time I trouble you—just once before I die, to hear you say that you forgive me—that you don't hate me. I will never, never trouble you again. Oh! Lionel, say that you forgive me!"

Tears still streaming down her face, she stood swaying to and fro, supported, as it seemed, by her hold of his hand, looking such a fragile, bending, easy-to-be-broken thing.

"If half you say were true, Caspian, it is your forgiveness of me that needs to be asked."

"It is all, all true. And I only ask you to forgive me my wild, wild speaking of the truth. Forgive me, Lionel, before I die. Oh! Lionel, forgive me before I die!"

She threw herself forward, or, rather, let herself drop, till she rested on his breast. Had he withdrawn himself, she must have fallen to the ground. He thought she had fainted: turning to put her on a couch, he confronted Major Harper. Caspian lay helpless in his arms, and he confronted the stern, questioning face of Major Harper. What better could Caspian have wished? Was not this just what was needed to complete her triumph?

Major Harper did not turn, or retreat; he came well on into the room, and then he stopped and looked Lionel in the face. His own face was at first stern and angry, but as he looked

into Lionel's, it changed and softened. Lionel looked harrassed, miserable, ill, but cold and haughty. He had got rid of Caspian out of his arms ; she had not fainted—she crouched on the corner of a sofa on which he had put her, covering her face with her hands. Crouching together in the most abjectly pitiful attitude, and covering her face lest it should show too radiantly triumphant, she waited to hear what would pass. In her hearing, or, more correctly, while she was in the room, nothing passed. The two men looked at each other, Lionel's face growing more darkly gloomy each moment, his heart heavier and colder.

“Go to your room, Miss Lockyear,” Major Harper commanded.

Caspian rose, falteringly, submissively, still hiding her face. She stumbled, wavered, and seemed as if she would fall. Major Harper gave her his arm, she all the time holding her handkerchief before her averted eyes.

“Let there be no quarrel. I am not worth it. I only am to blame!” she gasped, leaning heavily on Major Harper's arm, which dragged her towards the door impatiently.

“Probably that is perfectly true ; but, at least, it is generous of you to state the truth,” was Major Harper's answer outside the door ; an answer the tone of which did not please

Caspian. He left her, and closed the door behind her. Returning to Lionel, he said, "I think, Mr. Beverley, you will not be surprised at my asking the meaning of what I see transacting itself in my house? There is, I hear from my wife, a lady in England who is your promised wife, otherwise I should not interfere. I do not now know that it is for Miss Lockyear's sake that I feel moved to interfere."

Lionel's brow was threatening in its gloom; his tone was proud and bitter.

"I will submit to no interference," was his brief comment.

Major Harper ignored it, and continued: "Miss Lockyear pleaded illness as a reason for not accompanying my wife this evening. She had, it seems, an assignation with you? Or was the meeting accidental?"

"Major Harper, I feel called upon to suffer no man's inquiries into my conduct. I am willing to leave your house, which to me has been an accursed house—willing to give you my word that I will never re-enter it; but as to standing question and comment, I am not prepared to do so."

Lionel took his hat in his hand, and stood waiting Major Harper's further remark: he hardly knew, in his intense pre-occupation, what he had said, or what might follow—whether

Major Harper intended to take the tone of the protector of injured virtue, and call him to account for the fact that Caspian had been in his arms, or to take offence at his refusal of all explanation of the scene—he just waited to hear.

“And I, my good fellow, am not prepared to quarrel with you, unless I were a little better convinced than I am at present of the merits of the lady about whom we should quarrel.”

“I must hear no slight put upon Miss Lockyear, I suppose!” Lionel said bitterly. “I suppose we ought to quarrel, Major Harper; but, if we do, it is I who must be the lady’s champion.”

“There shall be no quarrel. May I speak a word of brotherly warning?”

“No!” answered Lionel; and he left the room, stepping from the window on to the gorgeously garlanded verandah. He brushed through the thickets of aromatic shrubs in the gardens, swung through the odorous plantations, taking the road straight to the Cliff. He paused when he gained an edge immediately overhanging the sea. The sudden night had fallen as he walked—a night that seemed to shut down the fragrance of the earth and thicken the air with odours. The moon was reflecting a silver crescent on an almost stirless violet sea.

“Did I hope he would quarrel with me—shoot

me? To be shot for *her*, and Viola to know of such an ending! Thank Heaven things are not yet come to that!"

As Lionel stood there in that perfume-laden balmy atmosphere, an intensely passionate longing for England—home—Viola, rose in him—England, with its December snows and its chilling, biting wintry winds;—home, any place that was in Viola's land was home. Viola! It was long since he had thought of Viola with the yearning passion of to-night—that hungered to look into the pure true eyes, to kiss the loving sweet-breathed mouth, to take and press upon his forehead the loving soft dear hands.

"I will throw all up, break loose from everything, go home to England to-morrow. It may be that to do so is to act like a passionate boy, but I will do it! There is wisdom in being foolish. I will go."

And Caspian? He thought of a certain expression in Major Harper's eyes as he had looked at Caspian, spoken of Caspian, and knew that Caspian was homeless, as far as Major Harper's home was concerned. What was to become of her? It was her own fault that he was powerless to help her. She would accept no such help as he could give: would only have what he could not, would not give her.

"She must take her chance! They will send

her home. She must take her chance with her own people. She is, after all, no better than they are—they no worse than she is."

So he thought; but there was a haunting fear told him that he had not done with Caspian: that she was too desperate, too far committed to stop short. To this he answered, "Let her die, if, indeed, her desperation goes that length. Better she should die than that all our souls should die—mine, Viola's, even hers, if she has one, withering in my hate."

Then his thoughts flew back to Viola again, and now the poison of Caspian's words tinged his thoughts of her. Was it likely that Viola still loved him, Lionel? After his coldness, silence, neglect? Was it likely she had not learned to love one so good, so devoted, so *present* (this with Caspian's own sneer) as Vincent Newnham?



## CHAPTER VIII.

## TRIUMPH !

IT was long past midnight when Lionel moved to go home. When he turned, at the first step he took, he stumbled. Stumbled over something soft, and slight, and white, lying its length upon the ground. Something that was not indifferent to pain, for it cried out.

“Caspian !” In much the same tone he might have cried “Scorpion !”

“They turned me away !—she did ! I had nowhere to go. I followed you as a dog follows a master, however cruel. Kind or cruel is no matter now ! I am lost, lost, lost !

“Determined, at least, that you will drag others with you—that you will not be lost alone !” was his comment of concentrated bitterness.

“I don’t know what you mean,” she moaned. “I followed you to the cliff’s edge, longing to know, before I die, before I go alone over the cliff’s edge, whether, indeed, there is no pity, no kindness, no softness in the world—for me !”

He answered, "There is this much—you have followed me here for your own pleasure, you must now follow me back again for mine. There is womanliness enough in Augusta, manliness enough in Major Harper, to make me sure they will harbour you this one night; to make me sure they did not turn you out into the night. To-morrow I charge myself with the trouble of sending you home."

Caspian, as he spoke, crept closer to the cliff's edge. She lay between him and the edge now, so close that a touch of his foot would have rolled her over. What faith in the unretaliating endurance of the men they torture women often show! Lionel stepped back away from her, saying,

"Come!"

"I will not go back there. I will not be so humiliated. If you try to force me to go back—then——"

She looked over her shoulder towards the sea. Oh! if only he could have been sure that for the dear love she bore her own soft flesh, she would never dash herself down that wall of rock! He tried a tone of command.

"Caspian, get up, come away, or I must force you to do so!"

Her answer was to creep a little closer still, till she almost overhung the edge.

"I will not move till you promise you will not try to take me back to the Harpers. If you come a step towards me till you have promised, I will crawl backwards, I will let myself drop over."

The extreme quiet of her tone, the hard, determined quiet, seemed to him dangerous. He could see that her face was hard and set. There was no darkness in that clear-heavened, great-golden-starred night. There was a pause, as between combatants, neither of whom knew what step next to take. Many thoughts passed through Lionel's brain. He speculated upon the possibility of springing upon Caspian and clutching her before she had time to know what he was going to do—of taking her by force back to the Harpers, and having her locked up there. But, from where she now crouched, even an involuntary backward movement might have sufficed to precipitate her. She had actually one foot overhanging the edge. There was more than the horror of her death, dying so, should she die, to withhold his hand from the possibility of provoking her to any such involuntary recoil. It all flashed through him; and he stepped yet further back from Caspian, and from the cliff's edge. It would be impossible, almost, that he should not be suspected of her murder, unless, indeed, she dragged him after her—as she was

capable, quite capable of attempting to do. There would be marks of a struggle on the cliff's edge. It was hardly possible he had not been seen to go there, or she seen to follow him. He thought of Viola, of the horror for Viola of such a story! Not that she would believe it; but that she should hear it, and know that others believed it.

While he thought all this, and more, Caspian watched him with cold-glittering, clairvoyant eyes. He groaned aloud. A cold sweat stood on his forehead. He turned from the cliff's edge, and began to walk inland, in the direction of his own house. She rose and followed him, as he knew she would. Once he turned upon her suddenly, and clutched hold of her, thinking he could then, without danger, attempt to take her back. But she broke from him with such a wild scream, rushing back towards the cliff's edge, that he did not repeat the attempt. He had not nerve enough to persevere in spite of threats and screams. He entered his house, going from the verandah into his usual sitting-room; he was conscious, though he had not looked round, that she, his evil fate, followed him.

Windows stood open to the night-coolness, and his native servants were lying about. The nights were at their shortest—the distance from

the cliff above a mile. It was already dawn when he found himself at home.

“Caspian, once more, and once for all, what do you expect, what do you hope from me?” he asked her, after he had silently for some moments paced the room. She had followed him into the room, had dropped down just upon the threshold of the window—she crouched there, always watching him. She looked at him with hardened eyes when he spoke to her, eyes of hate, in a sort, at that moment. She answered him—

“If I asked you to make me your wife, I should ask what it is shame to you, as to me, that I should have to ask. I should ask no sacrifice of you in asking this—for Viola is no longer yours. In asking you this, if I asked you this, I should ask for life, no other way will I live. But since you hate me—since you would, gladly, as far as I was concerned, have had me over the cliff’s edge—since your foot longed to push me out of your way, to roll me over as if I had been a senseless ball—since it was no consideration for my soft flesh and tender limbs restrained you, but only fear lest we had been seen, perhaps, even followed, and the deed should have been known as yours—since this is so, I ask nothing of you. Have it all which way you will! Only, know, I am in earnest; it is

one of two ways for me—life as your wife, or death—I am in earnest ! I have tried once to die ; but I tried a cruel way, I tried the knife. It was cold and sharp ; and it was ugly ! I did not like it. There are easier ways.—You don't believe I tried ? Look, then !”

There was a scratch, which had bled a little on the white breast, from which she tore aside the muslins ; it might or it might not have been made as she had said.

“A knife is so terrible to one's soft warm flesh !” she went on, “and it is disfiguring, so ugly ! I have not the force of will to use it ; but a spring from the cliff's edge—or a cold draught to make me sleep—these things are easy.”

Lionel resumed his pacing to and fro : she crouched there still, always watching him. Her eyes glittering cold and cruel in her white face, her delicate nostril dilating and contracting, her bosom rising and falling in quick, short, panting breaths. She watched consentingly, assisted at, inflicted, the soul-agony of the man she had thought she loved ! She saw the sweat standing on his forehead, and knew, at least, in part, what it meant ; but she was unrelenting.

Presently Lionel stopped before her ; he had been trying to think of Viola, Caspian's presence gave him an intolerable sense of pollution.

"One thing is certain," he said. "I will not have you here in my house."

"Fling me into the sea, then, or give me my death-draught to drink. I will drink it from your hand! I've told you I don't care to live. Either of those ways will be easier than to find any house where they will have me."

"I will find a house where they shall have you. Give me your word to stay, for the present, where I shall put you, not to attempt to cross my threshold till I ask you to do so, and I will tell you what I will do—I will write to Viola—I will tell her everything; even more than I believe is true—of your desperation, I will tell her. If it is with her as you pretend to think, she will be glad to set me free."

"And then to the dog Caspian you will fling the bone for which you no longer care!"

"But if it is not so with her," he went on, not heeding her interruption—"if, with unwavering faith (as I believe) she loves me still—if in what I tell her she sees nothing she cannot, out of her great love, forgive—then I am all hers, for ever, body and soul; and I swear to heaven, Caspian, neither you nor any one shall separate us!"

Caspian evidently meditated. Then she asked,

"When shall you write?" Adding, "till you have written, I will not leave your house."

“When shall I write? Now; the mail goes out to-morrow—to-day, rather.”

“Then I give you my promise, trusting to your honour to keep yours implied to me. If you fail in that, then mine shall be nothing to me?”

Lionel now called to an old native woman, one who had lived with him ever since he came to the island, and gave Caspian into her charge, telling her to be kind to Caspian, but not to lose her out of her sight. The grin with which the woman looked at Caspian, and listened to her master, maddened Lionel.

Then Lionel wrote to Viola; telling her all from the very beginning. He poured out his agony into her ear; wrestled for the possession of her love. He finished by saying—

“If you feel what, my angel, you will not—I know you will not, that you cannot forgive me, silence shall teach me this. I will not pain you to speak.”

That letter finished, enveloped and wafered safe, Lionel threw himself upon a couch, and immediately fell into a sleep; a sleep of deep and profound exhaustion that, for its few first minutes (till dreams came) was more like a swoon—a death.

He had not slept five minutes, not time enough for the wafer upon the letter to harden,




when one of the persiani stirred ; was, ever so slightly and noiselessly, displaced, and Caspian, soft, slight, flexile, writhed herself into the room. She literally crept in, and she crept on along the floor towards the table where lay the letter. She had to pass close to Lionel. Was there nothing to touch her in that attitude, in that expression?—the attitude one of death-like helplessness ; the expression, even in this profound repose, not relaxed from its painful rigidity.

One hand dropped to the floor, the other was thrown over his head—the head hung far back, and the hair fell back from the great brow—showing all its harassed, careful lines. Could one who had longed as she had often longed to have that head resting on her breast, and to kiss out its careful lines, not be ready to wipe out, as she only could, at a little sacrifice, its harassed, painful look ? A little sacrifice ! to give him up to Viola !

A little sacrifice ! No sacrifice, rather. There was nothing in him was, or could be hers ! No sacrifice of love, perhaps— But what of revenge, of hate?—Caspian had only glanced at him, just to assure herself he was asleep ; too intent upon her purpose to delay.

The table was now between him and her ; its cloth hung to the ground. Had he at this mo-



ment opened his eyes, he would have seen—only a white arm, slender, but most tenderly rounded, stretched over the table, till slight, soft, white, cruel fingers, could reach his letter. They had touched, but not taken it, when—“Accursed snake!” yelled Lionel, and started up. The arm was withdrawn, Caspian sank together in a heap on the ground, tasting death, as she thought, in that mortal fright and dread. It was only a nightmare dream. She heard him groan, and drop heavily back again. She lost no time: again the white arm was raised, and the white fingers felt towards the letter. This time she reached it, held it, brought it down to her. The wafer was still soft, as she had calculated it would be; she opened the envelope, extracted Lionel’s letter, and replaced it by one of her own, written on the chance of some such chance, while Lionel had been writing. Lionel’s letter she thrust into her bosom. She pressed down the wafer again, and replaced the envelope exactly where she had found it. All now was safe. She had managed all this without rising to her feet. The only thing was to escape again unseen; she could not pass Lionel with only a glance, as she had done before. It seemed as if he felt her eyes through his sleep. As she paused and looked at him, he moaned in his sleep, and muttered; but still he slept. His

forehead was beaded with great drops of sweat. Presently he lifted his hand, as if to push some one from him.

"I hate you, Caspian!" came from between his closed teeth.


She drew in her breath with a long "Ah!" and crept away. Creeping out as she had crept in, she was, perhaps, notwithstanding, not quite so careful; the persiani swung to after her with a noise that half woke Lionel, but he slept again, perhaps five minutes more, and then, after a desperate struggle, sprang up with a horrible cry. He looked about, saw his letter lying, as he thought, safe, and as he had left it. Wiping the damp from his forehead, he cried—"Good heavens! what a dream!" That was of his latest dream; for in those minutes of sleep he had seemed to have hours of horror. Thankful to be awake, he rose and shook himself, trying to shake off the impression of horror left by his dream.

"I was a fool to leave this lying here," he said.

He took the letter—Caspian's letter, dated from Lionel's home, addressed by Lionel's own hand—and at once locked it away in the post-bag, of which he had the key.

"Safe now!" he said; then again repeated—"Good heavens, what a dream!"

He had dreamt of a snake (of a snake that while it undoubtedly was a snake, was as undoubtedly Caspian) that he had seen wreathing itself round Viola, eating the heart out of her tender bosom, pausing now and then to look up at him, while he stood by, bound hand and foot, and gagged, and strained his life out to be free of limb and speech.





# BOOK VIII.

SORROW.



## CHAPTER I.

## SPRING-TIME AND HOPE.

IT was spring-time again—a sweet, soft, sunny spring-time—a fairer spring-time than there had been at Orchardleigh since the golden-houred first spring-time of Viola's avowed love. And, somehow, Viola *hoped*. Spring-time seems always to work some work of change in us—either awaking more or less vain hope, stirring vainer than vain regret, or, perhaps, with its blossoms shrouding a dead sorrow. In Viola it re-awakened hope. In the most hopeful of her more hopeful moods, she almost dared account all-hopefully for Lionel's protracted silence—the time on which he should, according to the first arrangement, have been back being now some while over-past—by the possibility that he might now be on his return. Perhaps he wished to surprise her—perhaps he wished to say to her what he could not write, and could not write without saying. Perhaps he wished to make some confession; perhaps



there was something for which he wished to ask her forgiveness, when he could read it at once in her face, instead of waiting to have it written.

Lionel with a confession to make!—with something for which he wished to ask forgiveness! The idea was, of course, painful—it was painful almost beyond the possibility of entertainment; but it had been of gradual growth, and things were now in such a position between them, that it seemed impossible there must not be something painful to be endured before they could be right again. If Lionel had to confess and to ask forgiveness, the pain of his pain would be her all of pain. What was there she would not forgive him? And she would only, she said to herself, see in his confession another proof of his superiority to other men—to other men who, she felt sure, secretly sinned a hundred times where Lionel might have failed once, but who had not his sensitiveness to feel his fault—not his courage and generosity to declare it. Still, of course, the thought of Lionel as erring and needing to be pardoned, was infinitely painful to Viola, who, when her father had once warned her of Lionel's "obstinate insistency on his own way," had answered—

"It isn't as his own way, but as being, to the best of his belief, the right way, that he insists

upon anything, dear papa, when he does insist. If Lionel hardly ever feels himself to be wrong, it is no wonder, for he hardly ever is wrong. I mean, of course, in those ways, and so far, as his fellow-creatures can judge him. As to owning himself wrong, it is not that he minds, it is the being wrong that is almost intolerable to him." So Viola had said, months or years ago, in the winter.

It was the spring-time now, the delicious early spring-time, that, for many of us, does such blessed healing work, clothes sorrow in beauty, changes grief to pathos, passionate regret to tender memory; shoots down from heaven a broad beam of light, up which we can reach to hope. The time that, while for many of us it may re-awaken old sadness (the sap of the new year giving, as it were, succulence to sorrow) makes present to us not the leaden-hued and leaden-weighted corpse of sorrow, but the arisen spirit. It was Easter time, and that year's Easter time was perfect in freshest, tenderest, new-born loveliness, of cloudless skies, purest air, earth fresh-shining after rain; fragrance of unchecked, prosperous growth, and most promiseful blossom. A blessed season for such as sorrow, not as those without hope, over a past grief, softening and sweetening the sorrow, freshening and strengthening the hope.

At such a season, such should feel, more than in the dead winter time, the pulsing through the world of God's love, more than in the dead winter time they should be able to realize the universality of love and beauty, and to believe that, though for some beloved one, lost since last spring time, this world's spring sun shines, and soft rain falls, and flowers bloom for ever in vain; yet on that other shore there blooms for the beloved a fairer, fuller, flowerier spring, nearer to God. So that even while the yearning mortality watches by the grave, gropes after the beloved, and cries "Lost! lost! lost!" the believing spirit may in faith find, recognizing the beloved as arisen, gone onward, drawn upward, nearer to God. May heaven send the blessed balm of such belief deep down into sorrowing hearts!—may it penetrate as the spring shining and the spring raining; penetrate and fructify to that holy calm in which those walk blessedly who taste and understand somewhat of the "peace of God."

But this fair spring-time, which should spiritualize dead sorrow, this time when the sap is rising throughout the world, and breaking into bud, and leaf, and blossom, and perfume, and song, and when the tenderness of beauty of the new-created world stirs to the depths all the yearning tendernesses, and longings, and

most subtle passions of the heart, this is, perhaps, an evil time in which to take a new sorrow home. The heart fully awakened suffers, as it would have enjoyed, to the full. All its pores are open, ready to absorb pain, as they would have absorbed joy and beauty.

And it was at this season that the blow fell upon Viola. In many lives sorrow follows upon sorrow, and the present sorrow makes that of the past seem nothing. In other many lives there comes at some period of life some supreme sorrow, after which all other sorrows seem as nothing. This grief that came to Viola was of the latter sort. It was not a girl's loss of her lover, so much as a woman's loss of her life.

An April morning. Viola, who never could sleep late, was, on this morning, dressed before the sun was fully up, and sitting at her window, to watch the first beams fall upon and rosily tinge the greyish woolly white of the pear-trees, one mass of buds, not yet opened to blossom. She fancied she could see the buds, awakened by the warmth, stir and expand when the rose-red beams touched them. Possibly she could really detect a stir and change, for, by that days' noon, when the world had been darkened for her with a long darkness, deeper and blacker than that of midnight, the tree she had chiefly watched was one world of dazzling white bloom,

from which, half-blinded by its sunny over-brightness, she shielded the eyes that were sick with something worse than sorrow, burning with the scorch of unshed tears.

Viola was languid this morning. The sweet soft air blew upon her soothingly and revivingly. She had gone to bed last night in a different mood from usual, desperate with sorrow, not unmixed with anger. Mr. Dalton had been urging her, as he had of late done several times, to write to Lionel, breaking off her engagement, freeing him, as, he told her, Lionel no doubt wished to be freed. Mr. Dalton, growing a little excited, had called her faithful clinging to a lover, who, he said, had shown such unmistakeable signs of wishing to be rid of her, unbecoming and unmaidenly. Viola had not cared to defend herself from this charge, but she had desperately endeavoured to excuse and to defend Lionel, knowing all the while, in her own heart, how far beyond anything her father knew he had sinned against her, at all events with sins of omission. And now this morning, this blessed morning, Viola said to herself,

“Perhaps he is on his way—planning a happy surprise for me. Perhaps this very morning, or on some such morning, he will be here. It won’t do to think this!” she added, feeling herself ready to faint with anticipated joy. “I

wish I had been a little more patient with poor papa yesterday," she sighed. "Oh! if only I were good!"

Then Viola began to think hardly of herself: to decide that she little deserved any such great happiness as that the possibility of which had sickened her to think of, having, as she thought, so ill borne suspense and suffering as to let them make her irritable with her poor weak helpless father, and unjust and ungenerous in judgment of their one true devoted friend.

Viola took up her little Testament from the table beside her; for half an hour she read steadfastly and thoughtfully. Then, not for the first time that morning, she prayed for help to bear whatever life might be bringing to her, whether of sorrow or of joy. Just as she rose from her knees she heard the swing of the garden-gate, and then the postman's step along the gravel-path.

The time was long past when there had been any leaping up and springing forward of her heart at this sound; instead, generally, there would come upon her a heavy heart-sinking and sickness of apprehension, a half-failing of her life through fear that, on such days as there was any special reason to look for news, sometimes made her limbs powerless and her eyes dim, not with tears, but with darkness.

It was not so on this morning, though she recognized the probability of there being a mail lately in. She had done with that sort of expectation—and besides, she had a feeling as if loving arms were round her, holding her in a holy calm. As long as she could she would rest in this rest. She delayed to go downstairs and to open the post-bag. She sat down by the window again, leaning her head back, closing her eyes, from which soft slow tears were dropping. She thought of Lionel—would her head ever rest on his shoulder again?—should she ever feel his arms round her again, ever be pressed to his breast again, feel his breath upon her cheek again, sweet and warm as the breath of this perfect morning?

It was eight o'clock now. Her father would soon be downstairs. Old John was with him in his room, helping him to dress. Viola felt eager to meet him this morning: eager, by this morning's warm tenderness and careful devotion, to atone for last evening's too angry vehemence.

Viola went down. There lay the post-bag upon the table, the key beside it. She did many little things before she opened the bag. Made the tea, talked a few moments with Nancy, and put her father's chair and plate and cup just where he always liked to have them. She even

for a few minutes, went into the garden. She paused under the fragrance of a great sweet-briar bush, from which the sunshine was fast drying the moisture of the night's rain-like dew, or dew-like rain.

"Can any one ever feel as if there were no joy in the world where there is so much beauty—the world to which spring comes, and will, at the worst seasons, have its days? And our hearts too," she thought on, "will, in their worst years, have their spring days, when beauty gets through into them, penetrates, and wakes hope: days when we feel that, for such beauty and such hope, life at its saddest must always be 'worth while,' always have in it more than in it we can sufficiently thank God for."

She gathered a few monthly roses, still moist and cool with the night moisture, tenderly bright, as if still flushed with the dawn, delicately fragrant, breathing promise of the fuller-flavoured rose fragrance of June. Standing, bathed in the brightness, steeped in the freshness of the fresher than fresh, and fairer than fair spring morning, Viola breathed out—

"If only I knew that Lionel was happy, then, I feel this morning—but would it last?—that I could be happy enough any way."

But would it last?

Then, her roses in her hand, she went indoors.



## CHAPTER II.

## WHAT WAS IN THE POST-BAG.

THERE lay the post-bag, of course, just as she had left it. She put her roses beside her father's plate, and then unlocked the bag. It was unusually full this morning. She took all the things out together. A letter from Rosie. A letter from Rosie was sure to be a pleasant thing, so that was laid, with the roses, beside her father's plate. Two or three letters, at the look of which she sighed. Evidently bills. Bills were sure to be unpleasant things; these she put under her own plate. Then there were two papers, and, as she separated these, two thin foreign letters fell from between them at her feet. At that the world began to go round so swiftly that it almost faded out of sight. She had to steady herself for a moment, by both hands leant upon the table, before she attempted to pick up the letters. She groped an instant, blindly, when she did attempt it, and felt for them where they were not. When she had

them she sat down. As yet the holding them in her hand was all she could do. There was a blackness before her eyes, through which she could not see. Was it the re-action from the outdoor splendid brightness? Was she blinded by a great glory of hope? It did not feel like that, yet, when the darkness cleared, and she could see that one of the letters in her hand was indeed from Lionel, and for herself, she said—"This, then, is the heart of my hope—this is why this morning seemed to me so special a morning." But she paused over the letter, and looked at it; she did not yet open it. She examined the other foreign letter. It had all the familiar post-marks—exactly the same that were on Lionel's. It was addressed to her father in a hand she did not know. This letter she now opened, keeping Lionel's tight clenched in her hand. For some time now she had always opened all letters, to keep all painful things as far as possible from her father.

But why did she delay opening her own letter—her own letter from Lionel?

After her eyes had for a moment or two been fixed on the page she had spread open before her, she stretched her arm out, letting the open letter lie on her lap; she felt again that necessity to clutch at something firm and fast. She grasped the edge of the table, till the shock

and rock of the world had quieted down. She looked out into the garden then. All there was, and was not, as she had seen it five minutes ago. It was all soft shimmer and shine still, but so far off—so intolerably distant—so out of reach! She had a sense as if, between it and her, a gulf was set—a gulf in which she would be lost, if she stirred from her chair. She looked at the letter again. The writing was large and clear, the lines were not many, yet that letter was difficult to impossibility to understand. Presently she laughed out loud.

“Why puzzle over this foolish and wicked lying, when I have the truth here close to me?”

Then her eyes and heart felt clearer, and she opened Lionel’s envelope—Lionel’s envelope, containing Caspian’s letter. Caspian’s letter was written in small writing—was all on one page of a large sheet of paper. Its signature, at the bottom of the page, written larger and clearer than anything else, was what first caught Viola’s eye. That signature was “*Caspian Beverley.*”

Before she had read anything of the letter, or had taken in any meaning from what she saw, except such as might be expressed by a sudden flame and blaze of eyes and cheeks, she heard the opening of her father’s bedroom door. She crushed those two foreign letters into her

pocket. That blaze of heat had died out as quickly as it sprang up. She rang the bell for Nancy to bring in the coffee, and to boil the eggs. Seeing her face in the glass, she struck herself a sharp blow on either cheek; and then, as usual, she went to the foot of the stairs to meet her father.

Old John, who was helping Mr. Dalton down noticed something in his mistress's face, on which he afterwards commented to Nancy—"a summat in her eyes like as if she'd seen a ghost," was what he said; but Mr. Dalton was too much occupied with the physical pain and difficulty of getting down the stairs to notice anything at that moment, and by the time he was settled in his chair by the breakfast-table, Viola's expression was a little more natural.

"What letters?"

Viola occupied him with Rosie's. Rosie was on an Easter-visit at the home of one of her former schoolfellows. Rosie wrote always such charming letters—so sweet, so thoughtful, so pictorial. But there were things in this letter of Rosie's that Viola, looking on at them before she read them, thought she could not this morning trust herself to read. But she read them when she came to them; they made no difference. Rosie spoke of her gadding-about days as being over now: she was going

quite to settle down at home now, she said—to learn all Viola's ways, and to take upon herself all Viola's duties, so that Viola should be quite free for Lionel.

"I am very happy here," she wrote. "Everybody is so kind, and it is such a beautiful country. I have had a most pleasant visit, but I long to be at home now—at Orchardleigh; the dear old home is always so sunnily in my mind."

Mr. Dalton listened to the letter of his young daughter with a gentle smile of tender approbation, his face only overclouding when she spoke of Lionel. It was always with a fresh, girlish enthusiasm that she spoke of Lionel; her sister's lover was her hero. All the brave and good heroes of whom Rosie read and heard, spoke to her with the speech, and looked at her with the eyes of "Viola's Lionel."

"A dear, good, loving child she is!" commented her father. "It will be good to have her home; she will make the house brighter for you, my darling." Then he added, sadly—"I trust it may be God's will that I shall not live long enough to spoil her life, as, I sometimes fear, I have spoiled yours, my Viola. Surely the way in which things seem to go wrong in this world—where the useless cumberers of the ground are left, and the youthful, powerful workers are cut off, and love is poured out

---

without measure and without stint, where it meets no return, or only ill return, and a life's devotion is given with no hope of reward—surely these things should be enough to make all who believe God to be a God of love, believe, also, that this life can only be some atomic fraction of an enormous whole—a small section of some immense circle—so small a section of so immense a circle, that we detect nothing of its curve.”

Looking towards Viola for some kind of response, he was struck by the expression, or, more correctly speaking, the want of expression of her face. He feared she might be angry at the covert allusion to Mr. Newnham. It looked blank.

“You are not well this morning, Viola ; you eat nothing, my poor child.”

She lifted her coffee to her lips, broke the piece of bread that lay on her plate ; but to swallow anything was simply impossible.

“So that was all the post-bag held—Rosie's letter and these papers ?” No response.

“Eh, my dear ? was that all ?”

“There were some bills, papa,” answered in a mechanical tone.

“Ah !” (with a long-drawn breath of apprehension) “not heavy ones, I hope.”

It was this, perhaps, was troubling Viola.

"I hope not heavy ones," she echoed, and then she forced herself to speak a little. But there seemed to her a strange mockery and unreality about such things as debt and money-difficulties, and material trouble. What could such things matter? That was only a passing feeling, however, she knew they did matter, that they mattered greatly—to her poor helpless father.

It was nearly noon before Viola found herself alone and unoccupied. Then she had seen Mr. Dalton wheeled into the sunshine in his wheel-chair; she had given Nancy her orders for the day, and she could be alone. Before going to her room she called Nancy back.

"Nancy," she said, "I am not well. How will you manage if, to-morrow, I can't get up. If I should be quite ill?"

"What is it, my pretty? Can't ye tell Nancy?" Nancy turned back from the door, and came close to Viola's chair. She put her arm round her, bending down over her protectingly. "Is it news you've had?" she asked.

Viola leant her head a moment against the woman's breast; but she did not cry, the time for tears was not yet come.

"It is something I can't speak about. I don't know yet what it is. It is—may be nothing—it may be—everything."

Nancy, pressing Viola's head closer against her, smoothed her hair fondly with her large hand, and asked no more questions.

While they were still so, Viola's head leaning against the old servant's breast, Mr. Newnham passed the window. Viola, as his shadow crossed her, lifted up her tearless, inconsolable face, and she saw him. Their eyes met. He read the expression of her face, and had seen the previous attitude of mistress and servant. What wonder if he were filled with bitterness? Eaten into by suppressed longing and passion?

"Don't let that man come near me!" Viola said, excitedly.

"He knows better," was Nancy's answer. "He's turned and gone off after Master."

"I don't suppose I shall be ill, Nancy, I never am. I am so strong."

"And that's a good thing, now, dear, ain't it? Whatever should us all do without you."

"Oh! yes, I suppose it's a good thing to be strong. I was only going to say if I should be ill—but I needn't tell you. You'll manage for the best, and Miss Rosie is coming home!"

"What is it you mostly feel, Miss Viola, darling?"

"A deadly sort of sickness. A feeling as if I couldn't move my limbs—but I know I can!—And then, every now and then, everything seems



to rock as if there was an earthquake ; but it is only my own heart."

"I shall send for Dr. Bertram."

"You are not to do so, Nancy. What I feel no doctor can cure. Just let me rest quiet, an hour, a day, a week, or a month, as I may need. I won't take a longer rest than I quite need. Then I shall get up and go on again, go on to the end. If papa comes back before I feel able to come down, tell him I have a headache, and want to sleep."

"Want to sleep !" she repeated to herself as she went difficultly upstairs. "Want to sleep for ever !"

Nancy watched her up the stairs, and heard her turn the key of her own room-door.

"I suppose it's worse than their dying if they turn bad," said Nancy. "Yet I shouldn't have thought that one could turn bad."

## CHAPTER III.

## CASPIAN'S LETTER.

IT was now that that white world of blinding beauty, the blossom-covered pear-tree, standing, shining, stirless in the noon-tide sun, smote painfully on Viola's eyes as she entered her room. The dark oaken wainscoting of the room seeming to frame the picture in a way that enhanced its intolerable whiteness. She drew down the blind. She threw herself on her bed, with her letters, feeling as if she would never wish to rise up from it again,—as, probably, she never would; but “wishes” have very little to do in such cases. Happily for us there is, for most of us, a “must” stronger than ourselves.

That letter to her father was from Major Harper; it was dated a few days later than Caspian's letter, but having come by a quicker route, arrived at the same time. (Caspian had this time not forgotten to put both date and address on her letter.)

Major Harper wrote to say that he felt it to

be his duty to inform Mr. Dalton, knowing that there was an engagement between Miss Dalton and Mr. Beverley, that "the girl Caspian Lockyear," who had been, for some considerable time, an inmate of his, Major Harper's house, having quarrelled violently with Mrs. Harper, on being reprovved for some fault of conduct with regard to young Beverley, had left their house, to throw herself upon his, young Beverley's protection, and was now, as far as they could learn, living under his roof.

"As far as they can learn!" repeated Viola, in an inconceivably scornful tone, and rising up wrathfully from her prostration in superb anger.

"What can anyone's heart be like who can send such a letter as this till he is sure of all he tells—sure, sure, sure?"

But remembering Caspian's letter, its signature, and from whence (Lionel's house) it was dated, she sank down again, and read on—

"I feel the heartiest sorrow for young Beverley. I believe the girl to be thoroughly unprincipled, heartless, and deeply deceitful. I believe her to have been throughout a very devil of seductive provocation, of feline feminine guile and craft. I don't say Beverley has been blameless, but I do say a much more blameworthy man would have come off better. What is a man, unless he has a devil's experience, and

no heart, against such a woman? If young Beverley marry her, as she means he shall, as, all along, it has been her aim to make him, and as, I fear, an altogether misplaced chivalry may lead him to do almost immediately, he is ruined for this world and for the next. He has no love for her, and he has much contempt. I would gladly see such women as this Caspian Lock-year whipped through the world in some way that should, even in them, waken a sense of shame."

"That would be well!" assented Viola. (It should be said, in order that Major Harper may not have beyond what he deserved of credit for disinterested generosity and sympathetic warmth of feeling, that Caspian had contrived, before she left his house, by giving Augusta an exaggerated version of "kindness" she had provoked from Major Harper, to make things very unhappy between husband and wife!) "That would be well!" assented Viola, and sprang up. All softness and all weakness seemed to have left her. Her cheeks were deeply flushed and her eyes were blazing. She moved about the room, clutching at the floor with her feet as she stepped, involuntarily clenching her hands. "I must read her loathsome words, I suppose!" she said, and leaning in one of the windows, turning her back upon the bright

world, she unfolded Caspian's letter. She had not replaced it, she never would replace it in the envelope addressed by Lionel. The envelope addressed by Lionel—yes, as she assured herself after long study, undoubtedly addressed by Lionel—she pressed to her lips and hugged to her bosom. Towards Lionel she felt no anger—only an agony of pity! If Major Harper, a man not even a near friend, pitied him with so warm a pity, with what a pity must not she pity him!

And now she read Caspian's letter. It is good to think how Lionel's letter, that should have gone to Viola, thrust into Caspian's bosom, rankled and festered there! How, by its keen contrasts of passionate tenderness for Viola, of reverent love for Viola, with veiled loathing and contempt of Caspian, it stabbed and stung there!

This is what Caspian had written :

"I don't know how to begin, how to address you, so I begin without a beginning, leave you unaddressed. I don't know if you or I should feel it the greater mockery were I to call you '*dear* Viola!' I never liked you, Viola! The only sense in which you were ever dear to me was this, that for a time you cost me very dear. For you won my lover from me, and for a time you kept him from me. He is all mine again now—and I forgive you! *I* write to you be-

cause it is impossible *he* should tell the story that has to be told. He will not see what I write. He thinks—what a fool the dear fellow is!—that I, being a woman, shall tell you more tenderly what has to be told. Tenderly! Even of myself you will find I shall not speak tenderly! But, you see, he still to some extent believes in me. Is it not possible, sweet Viola, this being so, that I may, by degrees, grow to be somewhat of what he believes me to be? Is it not possible? You, Viola, always disliked me, and mistrusted me, and shrank from me. You were always ready to believe me ready to injure you. Your feelings have brought about their own justification! I was the snake in your garden of flowers, you thought, and I knew that you thought this. I always felt that you so looked upon me; I have now come to be that snake. I have no wish to try and excuse myself. I know that you must feel my conduct past excuse. I don't care to spare myself any more than to spare you. I don't care you should excuse me. I have triumphed, I have won him! That is all for which I care! I always loved Lionel, and he loved me, or was just going to love me, when you won him from me! Well, I have won him back again, and we are quits! And I won't fling by-gones in your face. Nothing so much wrong in that! But the manner

of my winning! My conduct has been reckless and shameless, and such as you, my modest maiden, would shudder to hear of; but—it has been successful. I have played a desperate game, but I have won! I have won! I have won! You won't recognize in what I write the sentiments of the controlled, cool Caspian; but I am free now. How completely my victory is beyond question you will know by the facts I tell you. You will think me shameless for telling them, all plain and bare as I do, but circumstances have combined to drive me to a desperation which is beyond shame! On Lionel's account I have been turned out of doors by the Harpers, Major Harper unfortunately surprising me in Lionel's arms. I knew no house in the island open to me except Lionel's. I write to you from Lionel's house. I have thrown myself upon Lionel's protection. No alternative is left me, and he knows no other is left me, but to be Lionel's wife, to kill myself, or to live such a life as he would condemn no woman to live, even if he had to cut out his heart to save her from living it. You know, therefore, that Lionel will marry me—and soon! It won't be so very happy a marriage that you need envy me, Viola. He will regret you even in my arms, and I shall be fiendishly jealous. Still, I am not to be pitied—for—I have suc-

ceeded. And you? Possibly, Viola, I may live to be the more miserable of us two. If I love him enough to feel his misery, it will be so! Once I used to say in my prayers, when I still said prayers, but that is long ago, that if only I might win Lionel, I would, in all other things, be good—so good! But now—I was a child then. And the winning him has cost me so much sin that my soul is seared. You won't understand this letter, or my object in writing such a letter. I don't understand myself. It isn't any matter if you understand, or no, beyond this—that I am soon to be Lionel's wife—that in all time (of eternity I know nothing, and wish to believe less) he can be nothing to you any more—nothing, nothing, nothing: for you are, and always will be, good, and he is all but my husband. I should like to know how you bear it! But I know I never shall know. I don't pity you. I'm not happy enough to be soft-hearted. I hate you, I hate Lionel, I hate myself! I will write again some day *soon*, signing myself

CASPIAN BEVERLEY."



## CHAPTER IV.

## HOW VIOLA BORE IT.

THAT letter read, "She was not then, when she wrote, yet his wife!" Viola cried.

The letter had dropped to the floor; she put her foot upon it, ground it down, rather instinctively than consciously, however, for her thoughts were with Lionel rather than with Caspian. Was there yet any possibility of saving him? Before she had read Caspian's letter Viola had felt aflame with hatred of Caspian, now there mingled something almost like pity of Caspian with the loathing of her! Caspian knew, Viola felt, that she had nothing, never would have anything, of Lionel's love. A mad determination to start at once, to go to Lionel, seized Viola next. She began to drag things out of her drawers, to heap them together—she was going to "pack up." But she looked at the date of those letters—so long ago! She remembered how long it would be before she could reach him. Whatever was to be would long have

been before she could reach him. } And what would her reaching him then avail? It would only heap misery upon misery on him, remorse upon remorse. It would be a temptation to crime, against which who should say they would be strong enough to stand? No! the arms of their souls might stretch and strain towards one another, through all time, on into eternity, but in the flesh they must now stand for ever apart. What comfort was left in existence was in remembering that the flesh was mortal—would wear out. As any comfort left in her days must be in remembering that they would end, that there was night; so any comfort left in life must be in remembering that it would end—that there was death.

“Long, long before I could reach him Caspian would be his wife,” she said; and then, at the sound of those words, hate rose up again. “Caspian!—Lionel’s wife!—Caspian!”

Viola clenched her hands, fire was in her eyes, in her brain. She was startled at the concentration of hatred in her intonation of that word, “Caspian.” She cried to God, saying He knew that if she hated it was not for injury done to herself, not for her own poor life bruised and maimed, but for Lionel’s sake, for his suffering, his ruin. Lionel Caspian’s victim! The shame of it!—the pity of it! Such a man lost

VIOLA.

happiness in this world for such a woman !  
With the fresh recognition of this a fresh gust  
swept through her. She could have  
killed ! She knew she could have killed  
With the cry, " O, God, how miserable  
and how miserably wicked !" she present-  
ed herself on her bed again, and lay still.  
In that stillness was no rest was told by  
as her poor hands clutched themselves to-  
gether, and held themselves so clutched, as if  
dependent upon their never relaxing  
that tension.

She lay so a long time, not thinking, only  
waiting. When she stirred, roused by voices  
in the garden—Mr. Dalton's and Mr. Newnham's  
she had a half hope she might be waking  
from a nightmare dream. She lay and listened  
to what they were saying with a sense of com-  
fort in the cheerful tone, and in the trivial na-  
ture of their speech, just as one feels comforted  
in rousing from some horrid dream, to hear the  
cock crow, or the first chirp of birds—anything  
that suggests daylight and the out-door world.  
But for poor Viola there was to be no gradual  
dissipation of the horror, and growing of the fuller  
vision. It was the horror that was real and  
And if she questioned this, there lay  
a letter on the floor to answer her.  
as upon her bed now, clasping her arms

round her knees, looking out blankly with eyes that saw nothing. She felt such a wickedly-wretched creature—a creature to whom life and all the world had grown hateful. Was she the same Viola who, a few hours before, in this same room, had been full of such calm and holy thoughts—had felt herself so ready to say, “Thy will be done,” whatever that will might be?

“I shall never be good again,” she said—“I never have been good, it seems, only not tried enough to bring out the bad. Now I know I am bad. I hate her!—I hate her!—I hate myself!—I hate them!” The “them” being the speakers, whose voices floated up to her with the song of birds, the fragrance of flowers, the cooing of a wood-pigeon, the multitudinous hum of bees in the pear-blossoms. “I hate all the world and everybody, except——” A sob; then—“My poor, poor Lionel!” she whispered; and at the sound of these words, a flood of agonizing, unselfish sorrow swept through her, softening, cooling, purifying her.

She sorrowed for Lionel with a sorrow that, though it seemed enough to kill her, was holy sorrow; but for a long time, each time her thoughts turned fresh upon Caspian, anger staid sorrow, and rage checked her weeping, for it seemed as if the fire in her brain scorched back all tears.

Nancy several times came and listened at the door; once or twice she softly turned the handle, hoping to get in; finding the door still locked, she went away, noiselessly, as she had come. Nancy had memories and experiences of her own.

“She must have time,” she said.

The day went on. Viola was not disturbed. Afterwards, she wondered how it was that just this day, of all days, Mr. Newnham should have persuaded her father to be wheeled as far as Newnham, and should have amused him there all the afternoon, till evening—a thing that, often talked about, had never before happened.

Late in the afternoon Viola got off her bed, feeling as if she had had a long, long illness, and sat down to her table to try and write to Lionel—with no hope that any good to herself could come of such writing, but out of the necessity to speak to him once more, to try and say something comforting, to tell him she felt no anger against him—that she felt only pity, only sorrow, only love.

“Yes, love—I love you for ever, as you love me. I know it. I belong to you—you to me. We have to wait till this life is over, but we can wait.”

She repudiated the notion that anything could separate them eternally. The soul’s

sickness any more than the body's sickness. The soul's sickness had parted them for this life, as the body's sickness, bringing death, might have done.

"But if you had died, should I have left off loving you, Lionel? No, no, no! And neither will I, do I, now."

In her whole letter—and it was long, in parts, poor child, incoherent—she did not name Caspian's name. The letter was all grief and love, but pre-eminently love. If she had named Caspian, into it would have crept hate, anger, and ugliness. As it was, that letter was the mere voice of many loves all merged in one. The child's love for the dear play-fellow, the young girl's for her young lover, the sister's for the best-beloved of brothers; in its yearning pity, too, was something of a mother's love for a suffering, erring child; but all these loves were gathered into one—the love a wife gives to an adored husband, to whom, through all forms of sorrow and sickness, both of the flesh and of the spirit, she feels herself inalienably to belong, only to cleave the closer.

Viola's belief in Lionel's love never wavered. That he did, or would, or could love Caspian, she had no cause to believe. She had, therefore, no sense of real, of soul separation; possibly, therefore, her bitter cup might have been


more bitter: yet hardly. There was the pity of it—the killing pity, for Lionel. If he had loved Caspian, why, then, Viola must have gone for ever utterly desolate; but Lionel might have been happy.

How the tears streamed down her face as she wrote!—how her heart burned and melted within her for Lionel! How she realised his peculiar suffering!—he, so proud, to be so humiliated!—he, so intellectually self-reliant, to be brought to such remorse!—he, so dependent for happiness on sympathy and love, to have a wife for whom, and from whom he would have neither!

If even Major Harper, a man, and nothing to Lionel, could feel such pity for Lionel, what must it not be natural that she, a woman, almost his wife, to whom Lionel was everything, the sweetness, the brightness, the glory of existence, should feel?

Weeping as if she would weep her life away, she wept away some of the horrible sickness of her pain: some of that “wickedness,” as she called it, of her misery. She tried to keep her thoughts entirely turned away from Caspian. Would she ever come to have softened, exculpating thoughts of Caspian? Would she have to forgive Caspian?

How easy it seems to think of forgiving our



enemies when those we call such have no power to reach the core of life, can only sting and tease a little on the surface! Is that true? Is it not often the teasing, worrying insect that we feel the necessity to strike down, to trample on, to destroy, while, when wounded to the core, the injury suffered shuts out the injurer. Might she not hate Caspian as Lionel's enemy? Was she not, chiefly, Lionel's enemy? Was it not as Lionel's enemy she hated Caspian? Could Caspian have struck Viola and not hurt Lionel would Viola have hated Caspian? Who knows? These are secrets of one's heart from one's heart.

Viola saw no one but Nancy all that day; not Nancy till late in the evening.

When she met her father next morning—for she did lift herself up out of her longing to be still for ever—did drag herself downstairs—in spite of her longing to be alone for ever—she was immediately aware that he knew, by the way he looked at her. A look that almost forced her to leave him. She could not bear pity, because pity blamed Lionel.

He said to her only one thing—

“My daughter, you did not tell me of all the letters yesterday?”

“No, papa. And you must say nothing to me now. I can only say this—Lionel is blameless!”



If her father knew—then Mr. Newnham must also know. Major Harper had, no doubt, written to him. This belief that Mr. Newnham knew made Viola hate the thought of seeing him. As if he discerned this feeling of hers, he left home—left the neighbourhood for some months; without having seen her first, since the blow had fallen. Did it never occur to Viola to pity him; to look, even with the hastiest glance, at what he suffered—knowing of her suffering; knowing himself worse than powerless to mitigate, or alleviate it?

After Viola had sent her letter, she could not refrain from expectation. What she expected she did not know. No news came—no letter; not even the threatened letter from Caspian Beverley.

“He made her spare me that!” thought Viola. And the saying this—the thought of his tenderness for her, and the thought that Caspian was now under his rule, her husband—cost Viola the recurrence of one of the most violent paroxysms of her grief.

It may as well be said at once what had become of Viola’s letter. A letter that, had it come to Lionel, would entirely have thwarted Caspian—made her theft and fraud of no avail; pushed her for ever and at once out of his life. That letter came into Caspian’s own hands. She kept it, to give to Lionel some day! If the day

should come when she should wish to torture him to the most sensitive fibre of heart and brain she would then give him Viola's letter. Lionel fell ill, between the times of his writing to Viola and the date on which he should have had her letter. For months he lay helpless, and often unconscious. Caspian lied to him about the lapse of time, telling him weeks were only days. The doctors began to talk of fear that some permanent injury had been done to the fine, too sensitive-textured brain.

During this time, Caspian, breaking her part of the compact, was constantly about him. There was no one to defend him from her. Indeed, those about him thought him only too fortunate in so devoted a nurse.

When he was well again, and demanded to know what month it was, and what day of the month, and what had passed, what letters had come, Caspian gave him his own letter to Viola in Viola's envelope.

"This envelope is open!"

"I know—kill me for it, if you will—but I could not hold the sentence for my life or death in my hand, have it lying ready to my hand week after week, and refrain from reading it."

"There was more than this?"

By this time he had seen what Viola's envelope enclosed.

"Sending that—would she have sent more

than that? Good God! I hope you now believe in the hardness of that cold heart—reading your letter to her I felt——”

“I want to hear nothing of your feelings. Confess to me that you have kept something back. That there was more than this in the envelope when you opened it?”

Caspian swore to him a terrible oath, that she gave him all; that there was no more.

He, crediting her oath a little, was more influenced by the truth of her words “Sending that—would she have sent more than that?” No. No words she could have spoken could have been more eloquent than that throwing back to him of his own passionate confession. He could not doubt that the writing on the envelope was Viola’s. The date of the first postmark was just the date on which she would have received the letter.

Besides, who else could have had his letter in possession? Had he not himself locked it safe in the post-bag?

It seems as if Lionel should have doubted every evidence of sense, rather than think Viola capable of cold cruelty; but—they had now been many years separated, and, at intervals, during those years, slow poison had been slyly instilled into his brain.

So Lionel took home his answer—just waiting till the next mail to see if there came from Viola

any sign that what had been done in the first flush of anger, perhaps, had been repented ; but when there came no such sign, he took home his answer. Possibly even Caspian could not have persevered in her cruel course, had she not been stung to fresh hate of Viola by reading Viola's letter, by finding herself ignored, by finding it assumed that Lionel could not love her—she forgot she had said as much herself—by reading Viola's assurances of faith beyond this life, that claimed Lionel as indeed all hers still.

Viola, as month followed month, and let in no light, nor broke the silence—if only he had sent her one word of tender farewell!—day by day, week by week, realized her loss more intensely. Lionel was lost to her for this life. For this life she must, if she had to live, disentangle her life from his. Perhaps God would not exact life from her, but would let her lie quiet in her grave and wait. Why not live quiet in the round of daily duty and wait? At first that does not seem possible. The sunshine and the sounds of life, and the memories of the past, and the stretching on of the future, seem too keen agonies. Viola felt to herself like her own ghost. Moving about the accustomed ways, speaking the accustomed words, seeing the accustomed sights, hearing the accustomed sounds, lying down at night, and rising in the morning,

all in the accustomed manner. There seemed to her something ghastly in this living on in a world of unchanged externals, with a consciousness how all was changed within. She felt so hollow, so unreal, she sometimes wondered who would be the first to look in at the windows of her soul and miss her, perceiving the emptiness of the mansion.

When Rosie, who was "at home for good" now, a grown-up young lady, being surprised in a long, long look at her sister, would suddenly, if they were alone, throw her arms round Viola, kiss her fast and close and warm, press her cheek against Viola's cheek, in one of the lovely, soft, caressing ways, of which Rosie had many, Viola would feel as if the child (as they all still thought Rosie) knew something of how it was with her.

"Because I love you so!" was the only reason Rosie ever gave for these sudden and passionately tender caresses; but there was something more and different from just the accustomed love looked out of Rosie's eyes at these times. Rosie's eyes were the only eyes from the pity of which Viola did not shrink. More than she knew Rosie's unspoken sympathy soothed her. Rosie, Viola knew, would hear of no wrong in Lionel—no, not if even Viola herself had accused him!

# BOOK IX.

SCHLUMMER UND TRAUM.

.

.

.



## CHAPTER I.

## HOW THINGS WENT ON.

“**H**AS your sister been ill?” Mr. Newnham asked Rosie, the first time he came to Orchardleigh after his absence. His intermittent absence had lasted nearly twelve months—that is to say, during that time he had not been at home at Newnham, but only there for two or three days now and again. On these visits he always saw Mr. Dalton, and, as Viola knew, devoted himself to Mr. Dalton’s affairs. “I mean, of course, has she had a definite illness? That she has been sick with sorrow of course I know!”

“No, Mr. Newnham, she has not been regularly ill, but she is altered, isn’t she?”

Rosie’s sweet wistful eyes filled with tears.

“She is sadly, seriously altered. Perhaps your father, seeing her every day, doesn’t notice it. The alteration shocked me. Something should be done.”

“Mr. Newnham, it isn’t true about Lionel, that he is wicked, as Nancy says, is it?” Rosalie asked, with intense earnestness.



"Does Nancy say he is wicked?"

"No; but she tells me he has done the wickedest thing that he could do—and has broken Viola's heart. I don't, *I won't* believe it!"

"That he has not done that last I trust in heaven that time may show us—that he is not wicked we may feel sure, but he is no longer worthy of your sister, nor free to marry her if he were. She must forget him."

"Is it quite, quite certain?" persisted Rosie. "I did—I do love him so! Viola did, and does love him so! Do you know, Mr. Newnham, I think it would be better and happier for Viola to marry Lionel, even if he has done something very wrong, than to marry anyone else, however good. But I can't think of Lionel as having done anything very wrong."

"As to the wrong of what he has done God only can judge; but your sister cannot marry him—must forget him. He has already married someone else."

Rosalie paused, on this, perplexedly.

"Then Viola will never marry anyone. At least, I don't think she will," she said.

"I think you are, probably, quite right there."

"And don't you think that Viola, too, would be quite right?"

"I think, my little fairy-queen, that you are too young to understand and to decide upon

such a subject, and that it is one on which I have no right to express an opinion."

"How well I remember Lionel!" mused Rosie. "Though I was such a child I knew he was splendid to look at—standing in the orchard, under the apple-trees, with the sunshine on him. That is how I remember him best. Somehow, Mr. Newnham, I'm sure Lionel is good!"

At that moment Viola came into the room. She had heard those last words. She glanced from one to the other: they both blushed—though Mr. Newnham lately had almost lost that unfortunate readiness—and they both felt and looked like conspirators.

"Anybody so happy as once to have known him always would remember Lionel, and be sure that, somehow, he is good," said Viola. Saying it, she laid a caressing hand on Rosie's shoulder, and looked at Mr. Newnham sternly, and then immediately left the room again.

"Explain to her that I said no more than I did say," Mr. Newnham begged of Rosie. "She may think——" he paused—"she may think that I have been speaking against Beverley to you."

There was a startling earnestness in the voice that said this.

"I will tell her exactly what passed, if she will let me," answered Rosie. "But she won't

always let me speak out what I begin to say."

As the months went on and on, there sometimes rose in Viola a desperate feeling of the necessity for some change, some break in her life; to go on living exactly as she had lived when she had hope, when a sunny smiling satisfied life stretched out before her, to go on seeing and doing exactly as she had seen and done then, now that she had no hope, no future before her, seemed to her, at times, intolerable. She feared, too, that she was turning into a hard and bitter woman; she found herself saying bitter things, judging harsh judgments, expressing morose views. She had a feeling that she was thankless for all gifts left, because one was withdrawn. But then that one was all. That one withdrawn took with it all life, all power of love or joy, all good, all glory—at least, so it now seemed.

But it was difficult to know what could be done to give her any change. Her father could well spare her now (the bitter mockery of that!), he was so happy with Rosalie. But she had no friends she could care, she could bear to go to. Mrs. Althaus was anxious to have her, but Viola did not feel as if she could bear that, the memories that would stir. They had no money to spare. Each month seemed to increase the difficulty of meeting the month's expenditure,

and their income had now diminished to the minimum of what it was possible to live upon at Orchardleigh. Viola crimsoned with shame sometimes, to find herself, for her father's sake, receiving, or rather letting him receive, Mr. Newnham's frequent offerings of game, fish, or other articles of consumption, with a recognition of their practical utility as supplying deficiencies of the household commissariat. She thought at times of the possibility of obtaining a situation as a governess, or of teaching at home; but when she had hinted to her father her wish to do something of the kind, he had seemed so exquisitely pained at the notion, that she did not speak of it again: resolved to wait to see if it by-and-by became necessary. Meanwhile she could do nothing but keep still and endure.

One of the things Viola felt it hardest to endure was the watch kept over her by Mr. Newnham; yet she would not now have been glad that he should often be for long times absent. His visits were events; he brought in with him fresh air and sunshine. Weary with sorrow, satisfied with tears, no break in the monotony of existence could be altogether unwelcome. And then an old hope of Viola's was reviving.

Viola, one would have thought, had she not been morbid on the subject, need not have been aware of this watchfulness over her of Mr. Newn-

ham's. Nothing could have been more delicate, more negative, less obtrusive : he believed her to be unconscious of it. It was the sort of watch that might have been kept over one mortally sick, who was not to know of that mortal sickness : over one mad, who was not to know of that madness. (And sometimes she felt it would madden her.) He was always trying to ward off from her every word that could glance towards her, to wound and hurt her, and, in this endeavour he hurt her to exasperation. He was always trying, in every way, to lighten her burdens, and in doing this he laid upon her what she felt to be of all burdens the most intolerable.

Viola believed that if she could have lived alone, or among strangers, who knew nothing of her grief, everything would have been comparatively easy to bear. She who, naturally, had been of so sunnily-open a temper, so ready both to give and to receive sympathy, now shrank into herself, loathing to be pitied even by those she loved most, because she could not separate their pity for her from their blame, their misconstruction of Lionel.

No one now named Lionel in Viola's presence but Viola herself had, a few times, spoken of him, defending him with brief indignant heat, when she fancied that some arrow of anger or of scorn had been aimed in his direction. She

was over-quick to fancy this—felt herself to be always lying in wait for this. And so, a few times, before anyone present had recognised the possibility of offence, Viola had come down upon them with a little burst of defence. Lionel was nobler than other men, and more tender of conscience. It was his nobility, his sensitiveness, his chivalry that had brought his suffering upon him! He sinned less and suffered more than other men. He had sinned less than he had been sinned against; but, because it was by a woman he had been sinned against, he had taken upon himself the whole burden of suffering.

So she said one day, and Mr. Newnham, stung to unusual excitement, not to-day blushing, but turning white to the lips, exclaimed bitterly, almost roughly,

“Taken upon himself the whole burden of suffering! Instead, he has taken it off a devil to lay it on an angel! Miss Dalton, you really must endeavour not to let your sorrow and disappointment darken your reason. It is you who are the chief sufferer. Who can look at you and doubt it? Would to God I could!”

Viola was too astonished by this sudden outburst, to be able to answer anything for some moments. She seemed to have had her breath taken away by the unprecedented tone taken by the speaker. Then she said—

"I am not the chief sufferer. If I were, do you think I should care so much?"

She could only say that. Then she hurried from the room. She did not return to it until Mr. Newnham had left the house.

Mr. Newnham turned to Rosie. "What a brute I am to let my abominable temper get the better of me in that way! Beg of your sister to forgive me! To forget my words."

But worse to Viola than any such comment on her words, was the silence that at other times followed upon them when she defended Lionel.

## CHAPTER II.

## HOPE AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

THE months had gone on and the seasons. Summer, autumn, winter, spring again! The changes of season had brought changes of weather, of sun and cloud, of rain and snow and frost, of wind and calm.

But to Viola it had all been monotony. All mere outward change was no change; the same thoughts had filled her whether it shone or were cloudy, whether it rained or blew, or snowed, or froze, or were calm. The hopeful spring-song of birds had been to her no more hopeful than their autumn-singing; and, possibly, the time of budding leaves had been to her, just a thought sadder than the time of their fall. Perhaps, except for sin, such sorrow-making is sinful. Who knows?

Nothing happened within, and what happened without had seemed nothing. Even the change in Mr. Dalton, which might have brought new fears and anxieties, had been so gradual a declension and decay as almost to escape the ob-



servation of those who saw him daily. And the changes in Viola herself had been too gradual to awaken her own attention.

Viola had accustomed herself now to Mr. Newnham; he fretted her no longer. She no longer had any desire to push him out of her life; such hopes as she had centred round him. Her father and Rosalie (and Rosalie was the darling of her heart, the one bright, glad thing in her existence) were dependent on him for so much; for so much given so quietly, so unvaryingly, that it had grown to be as natural for them to receive as for him to give; and it would be difficult to imagine life at Orchardleigh into which Mr. Newnham did not enter largely.

And of Viola's hopes centreing round him Rosalie was the object.

Seeing Rosalie so beautiful, so exquisitely winning through the sweetness of her grace, so irresistibly love-worthy, feeling herself age rapidly, and harden, it seemed to Viola impossible but that, possibly even without his own knowledge, or even against his will, Mr. Newnham's heart must transfer itself to Rosalie.

All the news that in all this time had reached Viola, of either Lionel or Caspian was contained in some letters from Caspian, to Mrs. Beverley, which Mrs. Beverley had forwarded to Viola. In these letters she spoke of "her husband," and

she signed herself "Caspian Beverley."

Viola, through all this struggling time, had got no rest such as she had often longed for. Rest of definite illness, which should have made rest a *must*. She had gradually failed and faded to so low an ebb of health and strength, that life seemed hardly possible. And then, one spring-time, the sap began ever so slowly to rise again. The beauty of the world got through to her again, and gladdened, and moved her to gratitude.

They could keep no servants at Orchard-leigh now, beyond such as were absolutely necessary; and as those retained were no longer young and in full strength, there was a good deal for both Viola and Rosalie to do if the house was to be not only neat and clean, but elegantly neat and fastidiously clean, as they both loved to see it. To women who, like Viola, are women, and no more, not in any sort, to any degree artists, the necessity for domestic activity is just salvation in such circumstances as were now Viola's. She over-wore herself at times by more than needful activity, by over-restless action; but that phase passed, and left her the brighter for its friction, which had worn off some rust.

If she could have thought of Lionel as happy; and so eased the regretful craving at her heart,

Viola might now have been not unhappy. She had lost that sense of "wickedness." The sorrows of others appealed to her, and found her heart soft. For her father she had now again inexhaustible tenderness and patience.

"My blessed child!" was his oftenest phrase for her.


She had entirely, she thought, done with all chances of a life of her own, a happiness of her own, and this conviction gave a secure calm to the sweetness of her speech and ways.

Mr. Dalton seeing her, as time went on, so composed, so almost cheerful, began to have some faint hope that yet, before he died, he might see the fond wish of his heart realized. Of this hope he was wise enough to give Viola not the slightest hint. She even thought his hope and hers travelled the same road. That in Rosalie, bright, brave, beautiful, in mind and body, unsoiled and unspoiled by grief and by sorrowful years, Mr. Newnham might find his happiness; the reward of a long and vain devotion.

It was such a natural hope in Viola! They were constantly together, Rosalie and Mr. Newnham; they walked together and rode together, they talked, and laughed, and worked together. Worked—for Mr. Newnham, whose own grounds and gardens were perfectly ordered by a more than sufficient staff of gardeners,

often did more than half a day's work in company with Rosie—in the garden at Orchardleigh. All the brightening pleasures of Rosie's life came to her from Mr. Newnham. All the costly, pretty things she possessed were presents from Mr. Newnham (he had begun to make her presents when she was a little child, and it was so natural to keep up the custom). And to Mr. Newnham, or to any man, it seemed to Viola that Rosalie, in her freshness of youthful beauty, in her perfect sweetness (that was not characterless sweetness, but full of colour and richness of life), in her simplicity of innocence, must be irresistible.

It was true that Rosalie loved Mr. Newnham. Time and familiarity had strengthened in her, for him, affection, esteem, respect, gratitude. She loved him with a true, warm, substantial love; but it was a sister's love for an elder brother, a friend's love for an elder friend. Rosalie was an imaginative, poetical-minded young creature. Mr. Newnham did not realize her ideal. She would never think of him as a lover, because she could never have made a hero of him. And she needed, in a lover, to see a hero, or to have no lover. Rosalie knew that Mr. Newnham did not, except to please her, care for anything of the things she most cared for. She knew he did not more than half understand



the poetry she quoted to him—that he did not the least understand the music she played to him. She knew, too, how he loved, how he had loved, and how he did love, and would love Viola. Of this love for Viola he now made no secret to Rosalie. He spoke of it frankly—not often, but plainly enough now and then. And this love of Mr. Newnham's for Viola was the one thing in him that appealed to Rosalie's imagination, and approached him to the heroic standard. The one thing in him, besides his goodness, which she felt to be great, almost grand.

The child's heart was as safe as if she had been indeed his sister; but, if she had ever loved him, except as his sister, it would have been for his love of Viola. For Viola was Rosalie's heroine. As Viola, as she was now, so calm, so dutiful, so loving, and again so beautiful, well might be. Viola was Rosalie's heroine, and Lionel was her hero. Lionel, over whom, in her imagination, hung a cloud of mystery and of unmerited suffering, and whose glorious head, as she remembered it when she was a child, and he carried her on his shoulder, and she liked to see the sunshine turning his brown hair to gold, looked grandly through this cloud. All the heroes of Rosalie's love-stories would have faces like Lionel's. And Mr. Newnham, could

he help loving his charming, blooming little friend? He did love her. He loved her very dearly. For him she was Viola over again, but with a difference, and this difference one that made her only Viola's sister, and that shut the door on all possibility that his heart could ever take her in to set her in Viola's place. Besides, how was it possible that he should now help having hope of some day winning his queen, his Viola?

And so things went on and on at Orchard-leigh! The child, who had been barely nine when Viola and Lionel had lived those exquisite September days together, before their long last parting, was now a girl of nineteen. September was always, for Viola, a month of many memories. On this September, of ten years after that long parting—life-parting as it had proved, she thought—it seemed to her strange to see all outward things unchanged, and yet change would have seemed perhaps stranger. She often felt as if she lived a dream-life, and never more than in September; and she sometimes wondered if anything would ever happen to break the dream-spell, or if, as she hoped, just as the dreams of the day merged into the dreams of the night, the dream of life would deepen into the dream of death. The September beauty, of exquisite pathos, that seemed

above and beyond and apart from mere natural beauty, always seemed peculiarly the atmosphere for Orchardleigh. At least, Viola thought so now. Once it had been the goldened-houred blossom time, bowering the old house in bloom, that had seemed to her the time of times at Orchardleigh—as, one day, perhaps, if she lived to be old, it would again seem. But now she best loved the house, the dear old mellow-toned, red-grey house, with Septembrall evening gleams on high-up casements, and on the western part of the vine-clad oriel of its summer side, with the red-gold tints of changing vine-leaves, the hoary bosses of plumed clematis, the lichened roofs, part tiles, part thatch, and the cozy eaves, all mellowed in the evening sun of the evening of the year, standing amidst russetting orchards, changing elms, the softest, deepest green of pastures, and against a background of darkening woods, over which birds flew home across a mellowing sky. This was the Orchardleigh of Viola's love of love.

There are some sunny old houses where the very buzz and hum of flies in the window-panes has, or seems in our memories and to our imaginations to have, a distinctive dream sound. The same flowers that grow in other gardens waft, from the gardens of these houses of our dreams, into their rooms a different perfume,

fuller, subtler, sunnier, more distinct. Orchardleigh was a house that, whether one had seen it last in hail or snow or rain or sun, one would always think of as standing in the sun, mellowing mellow in mellow sunshine. With grapes growing golden amidst the mellowing-toned leaves on its mellow walls : with pears growing mellow to the core in the mellow sunshine of those mellow walls. It was a house of silent sunny passages, and of dried-rose-scented sunny rooms. A house whose casements seemed to catch the first sunshine, and to hold the last. I suppose the place really had a special sunny sheltered warmth, for I remember one of its distinctive features was a fig-tree walk, where the figs mellowed to a Continental luscious rich ripeness, and where the peculiar scent of fig-leaves always lingered, even when the trees were bare.

Orchardleigh was a place to be loved, not liked. Loved with a love to make one jealous of any season spent away from it. To make one, in other places, always be thinking how enchanting this blossom-time, or this June of wild and garden roses, or this mellow harvest-time, or this perfect calm of wintry frost and sunshine, or these tender stirrings and forebodings of the coming spring, must be at Orchardleigh ! Loved with a love to make one think



the first snowdrop seen there purer, the first primrose fairer, the first violet sweeter, the first rose rosier (both in perfume and in bloom) than snowdrop, primrose, violet or rose seen elsewhere.

## CHAPTER III.

## STARTLED.

ABOUT this time—that is to say a few months later, for winter was wearing towards spring—Mr. Dalton was suddenly ill. Only for a few days, but this sharp and sudden illness roused more special attention to his general state, and made them all recognize, in a startled way, how steady had been the slow decline from vitality of the last few years.

Mr. Newnham succeeded now in doing what, for a long time, he had been trying to persuade Mr. Dalton to allow to be done. He took Mr. Dalton, attended by old John, up to London, to have the benefit of the best advice. They were sometime away. It showed with what intimate reliant affection both Viola and Rosalie had now come to regard Mr. Newnham, that they were content their father should go alone with him.

“He is to me as the very best of sons,” Mr. Dalton had said to Viola, with a tearful earnestness of eye and voice, the evening before he left home.

"He is indeed, papa."

"I trust to God there is reward in store for him," said with even more significant earnestness.

"He deserves all that is sweetest and best in life, papa; but he finds his own reward in doing good."

"That is all very well, my darling, but——"

Then Rosalie and Mr. Newnham came in from the garden together; and Viola, looking at them, noting a soft suppressed excitement in their faces, little thought that it was of her, and only of her, they had all this time been talking. It is true that, a few times lately, she had been startled out of her cherished hope, but she had gone back to it: she obstinately clung to it.

When Mr. Newnham brought Mr. Dalton back again, evidently the better for the change, Viola found it difficult to learn from either of them the exact nature of the verdict given. They answered her questions with reticence. One day when Mr. Dalton was not present, Viola questioned Mr. Newnham with a closeness he could not evade, and got the truth. The physicians consulted (Mr. Newnham, always thorough, had not been satisfied to take the opinion of only one) had agreed that a gentle gradual decay, a slow sure failing of all the powers of life, was what was at present going forward in Mr. Dalton's system.

"And this, on reflection, it needed no physician to assure us," said Mr. Newnham, with those kind eyes of his looking down lovingly on Viola, and his kind voice speaking, as if by its deep softness it would soften off all the pain of anything he had to tell.

"But did they speak of nothing to be done? Must we merely sit by and watch him fail and fade?" Viola's tears were falling quietly. She felt a thrill of self-reproach. She was startled to a remorseful sense of having been pre-occupied, neglectful. She let her work fall, and lifted her tearful eyes to Mr. Newnham.

"One of them, Dr. Spurrier, said that possibly this district might be too humid for your father in his present state; that, possibly, decay might be arrested, and life a few years prolonged, by change to a more stimulating climate; especially by a winter passed in some dry exhilarating atmosphere."

Leaning in the window, looking down on Viola with a power and intensity she did not yet understand, gathering into those kind eyes, Mr. Newnham had spoken these last words with a gentle sort of embarrassment.

"Life a few years prolonged! Is that all, the best, we have to hope? Oh, papa!" Viola looked out with a face of blank sorrow, as if seeing life without her father, empty, desolate, un-

occupied: her tears dropped more heavily and faster. "And if no change is made, then——" she presently asked.

"Your father will not hear of making any change; he says it would kill him at once to leave Orchardleigh; but, of course, his opposition may be got over. We must get over it before next winter."

"But if we cannot manage it—if he will not go, or cannot go, and so things go on as they are now going?"

"Then Dr. Spurrier thinks your father will not be spared to us many years—it may be not, even, many months."

This was said, though gently, so firmly, that Viola felt the verdict had been very decided. Viola shivered; she was sitting near an open window that looked into the orchard. A few moments before the afternoon sun had been shining in, a light little wind had been blowing, birds had been singing—all had been jubilant. Now there was a great silence and stillness, as before a storm, except for one bird piping shrilly. The masses of blossom were relieved against leaden clouds, that had risen slowly and quenched the sun. It seemed to Viola as if a sudden sullen damp chill had come over the soft air. After a few more moments, the one bird was silent now, or only timidly essayed its voice.

"You are cold," Mr. Newnham said, and he shut the window. "It has suddenly clouded over."

"Thank you, I don't know that I was cold. But it has suddenly clouded over. We are going to have rain, I think. I will go and see where papa is."

"Not just this moment, if you please. It won't rain yet."

She met Mr. Newnham's eyes just then, and blushed, without knowing why, as she thought she had forgotten how to blush. It was no reflected blush; he was very white—white and determined-looking. There had sometimes now, lately, been something new in Mr. Newnham's eyes; once or twice lately her heart had been startled and her pulse quickened by something new in his manner—by a new meaning in his tone. These things she now felt in an accented way, and these things brought upon her a mood of strange and awed suspense, as if her fate were about to be taken out of her own hands—as if something over which she had no control were about to happen to her. Rosalie, who had been in the room, now rose, saying she would go and see where papa was. Viola believed Mr. Newnham had, by a sign, told her to do so. Viola looked after her with a wistful helpless sort of expression, but did not recall

her—did not follow her. She was conscious of a sudden failure of strength. There was a silence of some moments, and Viola resumed her work.

“Miss Dalton!”

Viola looked up at the speaker, and she knew that her colour faded, and her cheek curdled over. The impending somewhat was about to fall. She was compelled to a sort of fear and admiration as she looked at Mr. Newnham. He was white from excess of agitation—white to the lips. His whole life was at stake—that is to say, the happiness of it; but his voice was deep and decided, his attitude commanding, the expression of his face determined, almost stern. Viola would not have dared rise and leave him now. His long, patient devotion had been entirely free from abject slavishness, and at the crucial moment, as he felt it, of his fate, he maintained a manly composure. He recognised the uselessness of all impassioned petition: if she could give him what he wanted, she would: if not, so it ended.

“Miss Dalton, may I ask you one question?”

“I have no right to forbid you to do so,” she answered, tremulously. “But——”

Afraid she was going to plead with him for silence, he hastened to put his question—

"Can you give me any hope that you will ever love me?"

Viola, involuntarily wringing her hands together, looked, as she felt, upon the rack.

"You cannot mean——"

"You cannot fail to know what I mean."

"I had hoped that it was Rosalie—that is," added Viola, "I had hoped so till quite lately."

"Rosalie is loved as my sister; there is but one woman in the world who can be loved as my wife. It is either you, Miss Dalton, or no woman."

"Oh! if you had not spoken!" and Viola covered her face. She added, a moment after—  
"Oh! if it were not so!"

"Is that first exclamation a reproach, Miss Dalton? At least, I have not been in a hurry to speak."

"If it could but have been Rosalie!" and she looked into his face imploringly, almost as if she hoped to change his heart.

"But it cannot be Rosalie." After a moment, he added—"Your sister fully knows how it is with me. We talked together about it the evening before I went up to town with your father."

"Mr. Newnham, you deserve of all of us the best we have to give. She is that: she is our darling, our very life, as far as life means any



brightness. When I say, 'if it could have been Rosalie,' you should know what that means of our esteem, gratitude, affection for you."

"She is my dear little sister and friend. She is not—she never will be—she never would be—any more, any different."

There was a touch of impatience in the way this was said.

"Mr. Newnham, if you could but unspeak those words! You do not see it so. I don't mean any reproach to you, but are you not asking me to sell myself for my father? I can't help knowing what you have in your mind—why you speak now."

"Good heavens, Miss Dalton! If I had thought it possible you could so look at it, I would have cut out my tongue sooner than I would have spoken now. It is my blundering, blunt way. Remember, I have only asked you—if there is any hope that you could *ever* love me."

"You deserve something better of all of us than anything I can ever give; if I ever could have anything to give."

"Something better than what? Something better than the best? Something better than my heart's desire? Something better than to realize the wish of my life? The longing that has mastered me the more the more I have mas-

tered myself, that has grown stronger the longer I have waited? There have been times, I don't deny, when I have resisted this mastery, Miss Dalton, when I have tried to sing the old song,

‘If she be not fair for me,  
What care I how fair she be?’

But you are, and ever will be, fair to me, whether for me or no, you, and only you, of all the women of all the world.”

Viola could only repeat: “You deserve something better than I can give you; if, indeed, which I do not think, I can give you anything.”

“I ask for no immediate answer; I speak now because I have fancied lately that you were under a mistake about your sister, and I wished to turn your thoughts in another direction—in the true one. I want you to know that it is you who are the only woman I love, or shall, or can love. That it is from you, if you can love me, but whether you can love me or no, from no other, that the happiness of life can come to me. I can do without a wife, as I can do without happiness. I don't ask you to believe that I shall pine away and die if you tell me you can't love me. I can do without a wife, but I can't do with any other woman as my wife!”

He grimly smiled with those white lips of his, as he finished speaking. He was “wise” in his

wooing of Viola. Again she looked up at him in enforced admiration.

"Nor," he added, "can I do with a wife who does not love me, even if you should be that wife. My question is, Miss Dalton, is it possible you can ever love me?—love me, not for pity, but for love?"

If he had pleaded passionately for Viola's consent to be his wife because of his love for her, whether or no she could have loved him, Viola would probably have been repelled; but the almost judicial calm and moderation of his words, while the whiteness of his lips, and the intensity both of his voice and of his eyes testified to how much he felt to be at stake, compelled her respect and admiration. She answered him with a plea for time to think.

"It is only just to you that I should have time to think," she said. "You are, by so many threads, so much entwined with my life, I have so much esteem, affection, gratitude for you, that it is difficult to know what more there may be, or might be. If you could have found your happiness elsewhere, I should have been well content. I am weak and weary of heart. It is impossible I should ever love you as you deserve to be loved."

"I have no ambition to be loved as you think I deserve to be loved. I will be content, my

God! how much more than content" (repressed passion broke through here), "if you will, any way, love me—that is, love me with the best love that you now have to give in love. I am now, Heaven only knows, how much more than content, only to know that you do not feel that you never can love me!—that you do not at once and absolutely push me out of the heaven of my hope! I may be rashly presumptuous, but I have a deep, strong faith that, if I have the chance, in the end I may be happy enough to win from you the love that has been for years my heart's desire!"

It was a radiant face that looked down on Viola; something of triumphant joy would shine through the gravity of composure he tried to maintain.

"Ah! I have said too much!" cried Viola. "I am most cruelly cruel if I have raised hope that I may have to kill again! I only asked for time to think, and you——"

"Take time to think—as much time as you please, Miss Dalton. You may trust me not to presume on any hope kindled by your abstinence from immediate denial of all hope. And if, by-and-by, you see fit to destroy that hope, I will only thank you for the short joy of it. I will tell you frankly that what I chiefly fear in you is an over-conscientiousness, an over-

valuing of my desert, an under-valuing of your own value to me. If only you have love to give that is, or may grow to be, of the best love, whether it seem to you much or little, it will be the world to me—don't withhold it. I want to make you know the truth—before you deliberate—the truth of how absolutely and unwaveringly I feel you, Miss Dalton, to be the only woman the world holds for me to be thought of with love. If you were blotted out of my universe, as I said, I should not die, but life would be without happiness, and everything without hope. I have tried to be calm, to know the truth of things. I swore to myself that I would not try to take you by storm, that I would suppress all turbulence, all vehemence; but my calm may mislead you. It is well you should recognize how I love you; at the same time I know well that you will feel that the more I love you, the less you should marry me if you feel love for me to be impossible; but if indeed you feel love for me, wifely love for me, not impossible, then remember that what you may think to be little is much, is all to me. Life holds for me what you can give of that love, or nothing of that love."

There was passion in Mr. Newnham's voice and in his eyes—it was noble and controlled passion. But by the strength of what was now

betrayed, Viola might have guessed at the strength with which till now it had been all restrained. He grasped her hand, and kissed it, and hastily left her. She at once escaped to her own room. A few moments after some great rain-drops fell, and she saw him, faster than old John could manage it, pushing Mr. Dalton's wheel-chair towards the house. There was a glow on Viola's cheek as she watched him, such as it had not known for years, and a glow in her heart, too—a comforting, cherishing warmth. But she was afraid—as well she might be—afraid of being over-influenced by external things; afraid, too, of being led astray by something of which she had never, till now, been conscious—a weariness of sorrow, a little craving for personal happiness, for a future of her own; to have part and place in the world again. To be loved and cherished all her life by love so strong and so delicate, seemed pleasant to think of, in a hazy, dreamy, unrealizing way.

Viola was weak at this time—weak mind and body; she was confused, too, as if startled from a long, deep sleep. Had the abstract case been presented to her, had she been called upon to decide how a woman placed in the position in which she was placed should act, she would unhesitatingly have decided that the one love

that had been should continue to be the one love, could be replaced by no other.

But Viola was weak now, and full of weak womanly cravings for love and care. The possible future of life after her father should be gone, looked blank, and cold, and grim. Viola tried to fancy what her life would be if Mr. Newnham were taken out of it; if she had to say a final good-bye to him; if she knew his kind eyes were never to look into hers again, his kind hand never to hold hers again. Certainly what sunshine remained to her would be obscured, as by a cloud. Yet, after what had past, she did not see that things could go on in the same way they had done so long; besides, she was awakened to the selfishness of that way; he had been giving all, she nothing. She could no longer pretend blindness, even to herself. The heart and passion of the man had spoken. She must now give something, or lose all! She sat and thought and thought; hour after hour went by. And, as could not but be, her thinkings of him, grew more and more tender, [as she more and more recognized the unselfishness, the freedom from all ostentation, of his long devotion.

Tears streamed down her cheeks.

“God bless him!” she said softly—and she added—“Thank God, I think it cannot be but

that I shall love him, that I do love him."

Nancy came to her door to summon her to the tea-table. Mr. Newnham, she knew, was gone. When she went down she had resolved to be generous, not to keep him in long suspense; yet she had a sort of shrinking from the possible demonstrativeness of his delight.

She felt that she owed him different treatment from that she would have given any other lover. He ought not, having waited so long—and having, as she felt, spoken at last, so nobly—he ought not to have to renew his pleading; yet if he did not renew it, and she waited it would become impossible for her to speak.



## CHAPTER IV.

WHAT VIOLA DID, AND HOW ROSALIE FELT ABOUT IT.

FOR a few weeks things went on as usual. Mr. Newnham avoided, in any way, troubling Viola; but she felt as if he were watching for a sign with an earnestness that wore him out. She had determined to give him some such sign as he waited for; but, hitherto, just when the chance offered, her courage had failed her.

One sunny spring afternoon, Mr. Dalton was being wheeled up and down the garden as usual. With Mr. Dalton were, as usual, Mr. Newnham and Rosie. As they passed, and re-passed, the window where Viola sat, at work, she was conscious of the searching wistfulness of Mr. Newnham's glances in her direction. She was conscious, too, of an anxious gravity in his face.

Presently she threw a light shawl over her shoulders, and joined the out-door group. It was an impulse.

Mr. Newnham made way for Viola next to her father's chair. Viola, without turning towards

Mr. Newnham, as she took her place by his side, passed her fingers through his arm; she felt the sort of shock that ran through him as she did so. And as she felt this, feeling herself now irrevocably committed, for an instant she could have swooned with fear. He gave a half-glance to assure himself that the hand was Viola's, not Rosalie's. In Rosalie the action would have meant nothing; she often hung upon his arm, she hardly remembered he was not her brother. In Viola such a voluntary action meant everything.

He said nothing; his arm pressed those fingers against his heart, as if he would press them into his heart; but he said no word. They all walked up and down, and to and fro a few times more, in silence. Then he detained her a moment in the porch, as Rosalie and old John helped her father in; detained her, by not letting those fingers go, and drew her back from the house—for one turn more.

“Viola, what may I dare hope?”

“Viola?” his voice thrilled and startled her, as did the controlled intensity of his expression.

“I think I can love you,” she said, trying to smile. Then she added, with a burst of tears, “God grant I may never be unworthy of your love, beyond the unworthiness I feel now. God grant I am not now doing you wrong.”

A wood-pecker in the orchard—the sun was still a good way from setting—laughed out a mocking laugh that sounded so shrill, so near, so human, it made Viola start. She felt suddenly, strangely chill.

She looked up into Mr. Newnham's face, and saw there why he did not speak. And the chill left her, and warmth returned. Not another word had been spoken when they entered the house!

"Oh! Viola, I am so glad," Rosie said, that evening. "He is so good. He is grand, because he is so good. And he loves you so. I am so, so glad!"

Yet, in Rosalie's fair face there was a little wistfulness of wonder and of inquiry. In real life it seemed such a good thing for Viola to be able to do as she was about to do! But, the heroine of Rosie's romance, her ideal woman, would not have been able to do this; would have been always faithful to Lionel. By this discrepancy Rosalie was perplexed and a little pained. It was almost as if Rosalie were jealous for Lionel! Poor Mr. Dalton cried and sobbed with delight.

Nancy hugged and kissed Viola. Even old John grinned congratulations. Everybody seemed so glad! Perhaps, in this queer world, a deed of which everybody seems glad, is one of

which we should be warily distrustful. The "praise of man," and the "praise of God," being so often in opposition.

That night, after Rosie was in bed, before she had slept, her tall, pale sister came into the room: looking in her blue dressing-gown, with her long beautiful hair hanging loose, like her own spiritualized self, shading her candle with her hand, she paused just inside the room.

"I am not asleep, Viola," and Rosie sat up in her bed, all expectation.

Viola put the candle down on the dressing-table, and came to Rosie's side. She knelt down by Rosie's bed. Rosie saw now that Viola had in her hand a good-sized packet, made up with fair white paper, tied round with a blue ribbon, of the shade Viola used to wear in her hair—long ago, the shade Lionel loved.

"I want you to take care of these for me, Rosie. No, I mean take care of them *from* me. Burn them, if you think best, or keep them locked up very safe, but never let me have them or see them again. I was going to burn them, but I could not; so, sweet little sister, I bring them to you; you are no child now!—you are wise and good, you are my own heart's darling, I can leave them with you."

Viola laid the packet on her sister's pillow—laid her cheek against her sister's cheek, for

perhaps ten minutes; then, without another word, she went away. Rosie did not sleep again for a long time. She held that packet in her hand under her pillow: the wonderful calm moonlight was filling her room. She lay awake till dawn. A strange feeling of awed expectation was upon her. She watched the door and expected, or felt as if she expected, that Viola should come back again, reclaim her treasure, and tell Rosalie she could not marry Mr. Newnham. At dawn she sat up in bed and examined the packet. She found there was a smaller one tied to the larger. The larger was labeled, "Lionel's Letters." The smaller packet she, fancying what it held, opened and looked into. Different likenesses of Lionel, taken at different times, and a large beautiful lock of Lionel's hair. Rosie gazed at one photograph after another, with an intense earnestness of inquiry, trying to see in at the eyes. She took up the lock of hair and passed it caressingly between her fingers.

"I may keep these for mine!"—she thought of the hair and the photographs. And then she gazed at the one she had chosen out to be best esteemed as the best likeness, and thought about Lionel till the tears, tears she did not comprehend, tears of a strange pathos, pity, excitement, ran down her face. "Poor Lionel! Dear Lionel! All your life wasted by a wicked

---

woman ! All your years you are to be miserable —miserable at home with a woman you despise, miserable abroad with a woman you are ashamed of ! Oh ! Lionel ! oh ! Lionel ! And you look so true and so strong !”

An impulse seized the girl. She sprang out of bed, thrust her little white feet into her slippers. She would go to Viola, and beg and pray her not to marry Mr. Newnham—to wait and wait and wait, to see if, some day, Lionel’s wicked wife might not die, and Lionel come back. But Rosie did not go. Rosie felt as if Lionel’s face were asking her to do so. But then she thought of Mr. Newnham, remembered all he had said to her, of how much better and brighter and happier Viola’s life would be if she could love and marry. She thought of its being more than ten long years since Lionel had left Viola. She thought of Mr. Newnham—of how transfigured with joy his face had looked last night ; she thought of how patiently and unselfishly he had loved Viola all these long years. It would be cruel if now he were to lose all his chances of happiness while Viola waited on, and waited for what might never, probably would never come. Then she thought of her father. He had been so glad. Disappointment might almost kill him. And such good things would come to him from Viola’s marrying Mr. Newnham.


The slippers were thrown off, and Rosie got into her bed again.

"I can't do it, Lionel!" she said. "I can't do it, dear Lionel!"

Then she lay and meditated. Life-long constancy might do in books, she thought, where things could be made to fit in to suit it—perhaps even in just a life here and there, it might be the better thing; but out of books, in most lives, it was, she feared, a waste of life. She would have had Viola, as her ideal heroine, wait always for her ideal hero, Lionel; but in real life she did not like to think of Viola growing old, waiting, waiting, living lonely, alone, poor, waiting, waiting, being called an old maid, and perhaps really becoming one, waiting, waiting.

And then Rosalie, philosophizing, trying to see how the rightness of a thing in the abstract, and viewed from an ideal standard (and Rosalie had thought enough about such things not to confound the unreal and the ideal, but to think of the ideal as just what might be if all conditions of things and people were at their best possible) could be reconciled to the unsatisfactoriness of it worked out in ordinary life—Rosie, so philosophizing, those precious things garnered under her pillow, her hand upon them, the sunshine of the spring morning streaming across the dark oak floor, fell asleep.

Rosalie had been but barely seven years old when she last saw Lionel. Yet, of all her romances, Lionel was, had been, would be the hero. And Viola might no more be the heroine. Who, then, would be? Not Caspian! No, Caspian was Lionel's evil genius; the snake-woman, the Lamia, the Geraldine, the fair-faced, foul-natured witch. Only the day before, reading in the *Mort d'Arthur*; how Queen Guinever writes to La Belle Isoud, bidding her "be of good cheer, for she should have joy after sorrow, for Sir Tristram was so noble a knight called, that by crafts of sorcery ladies would make such noble men to wed them, but in the end, Queen Guinever said, it shall be thus, that he shall hate her, and love you better than ever he did before"—only the day before, reading this, Rosalie had thought of Viola, of Caspian, and of Lionel. And now of Rosalie's romance of Lionel, Viola must never any more be heroine.






## CHAPTER V.

## WHEN IT WAS DONE.

AND Viola, when it was done. Viola was at her weakest now. I suppose there is a time in all lives when what there is of heroism in those lives, at their best, is weary, and has, as it were, lain down to sleep and rest—when there is a glamour of warmth and delight shed upon the lower path, the easier way, and the higher path, and the difficult way seems to lead out into a waste of cold and darkness, of chill desolation and solitary grief, from entering upon which the poor mortal feels an unutterable recoil. A woman is but a woman, and in how many ways, in such a case, can she deceive herself? How few even believe in the unity of love—one love for one life, in the sense of the absolute love. Possibly, having loved Lionel as she had loved him, she should have waited and waited on through this life into the next, bearing life as best she might, using life as best she might, as she had at first thought to do. But she was only a woman,



and she yearned for love, and care, and tenderness, and fireside happiness—not only to take, but to give these things. Of course, this was not all. Probably how much one thing weighed with her, how much another, she was entirely unconscious. What she did was best for all of them—was greeted with joy and approbation by all of them. Then, great part of her nature was asleep, a dream, in weariness of the monotony of sorrow. She was at her weakest. She was not a heroine: she was but a woman now; yet she had loved Lionel with more than the love of just any mere woman.

Mr. Newnham, it must be said, showed the tact given by intensity of love. He never startled Viola, or ran the chance of repelling her; he was the most unexact, and the most undemonstrative (in any ordinary manner of demonstration) of lovers.

All things went on so much as before, that it seemed to Viola sometimes as if she had dreamed a dream within a dream; but she had only to look up, if Mr. Newnham's eyes were on her, and meet the intense expression of those kind eyes, to know that it was no dream. At such times she often involuntarily sighed. Once, when he asked her the meaning of that sigh—"Because you love me so much too well," she answered.

"Of that I am the best judge," was his comment.

Another time she answered to the same question—"I am tired."

"Of me?"


"Of thinking that I never, never, never can love you enough—be good enough to you."

He made her life brighter with old pleasures—so old, that they were new again. He got her to ride again, and they had long bright spring mornings, and long summer evenings together. Rosalie was delighted to give up her rides to Viola; they could not both leave Mr. Dalton. But Viola would not have her do so always. Viola got into better health and spirits than she had known for long. She looked forward to her new life with some amount of bright elasticity. She would be a good wife, a good mistress: in time, if it pleased God (to what woman is this the least of longings?), a good mother.

After long dull years, this spring and summer of more active out-door varied life, formed so bright a change, the plunging so much more than she had done for long into the beauty of the natural world, was so keen and so healthy a delight, that Viola was more carelessly content, more unquestioning in all ways than she could otherwise have been—than she could have believed she could be.

And so the time went on. She was to be married in September. They were all to winter abroad, in any place Dr. Spurrier should judge to be best for her father. Viola and her husband were to start immediately on their marriage for whatever place should have been decided upon; they were to make all needful arrangements, and then to return to fetch Mr. Dalton and Rosalie. This is why the wedding could not be later in the year.

Mr. Newnham's wedding-tour was therefore to be a characteristic one. Viola could not fail to be touched by the supreme unselfishness of all his thoughts and plans—could not fail to be touched to deepening and strengthening tenderness of affection. He was so good! She could sit for hours and think of his goodness, with tears falling on her work, and into her lap, as she thought. In his personal absence, and his presence in her thoughts, he would grow heroic; and they were not yet familiar enough, in the sense of the familiarity of the intimacy of daily life and of common things, for that notion of him to be quite completely destroyed by his personal presence. It never occurred to Viola to notice how little of companions they were, she and Mr. Newnham—how seldom they spoke together of any but the most practical and external things. In fact,



they were never alone together, except in those long rides. Viola did not notice this; she had no craving to be alone with him. She had nothing to say that she could not as well say in the presence of her father and her sister. If Mr. Newnham longed to have things different—to have Viola to himself—he postponed the gratification of his own wishes, as, he said to himself, he could well afford to do, now that he had the sure and blessed belief that Viola was for life to be his. For life to be his!

To sit and look at her, and remember that; to watch her move about, and remember that; to hear her voice, and remember that; to breathe the impalpable fragrance of her presence, and remember that; to watch the fair, soft freshness that had come over her face, and remember that; to meet the loving, quiet light of her eyes, and remember that—Good heavens! was not this enough? After years of hopeless love, to recognise, as he watched her, “She is mine—she lets me love her—she loves me—she is to be my wife!” Good heavens! what more could he need? As yet—as yet—that was the fearful danger of it—the certainty that these things could not always, or even long, content him. To hold her soft white womanly hand in his, to kiss it as he relinquished it, and as he bent over it to feel her

breath upon his cheek ; to be near enough to her to breathe the warmed fragrance of the flower she wore, or of herself (the two for him were indistinguishable)—no further than this had he yet availed himself of the privileges of his position—if she could have known what these things meant to him, well might she have died of fear, giving so little of love into such a great, hungry, love-demanding all—giving just enough to give him right to claim an all that was more than she could give.



**BOOK X.**

**PUT TO THE PROOF.**





## CHAPTER I.

## MAN OR HERO?

THE *sure* belief that Viola was to be his, his only, his wife, his only for all time! Well, had he not now reason to be safely sure of this? To hold it now a belief only to be shaken with his life? If people did always right and wisely, even if only such people as we, by comparison, call "good," did always wisely and right, the romance-writers' trade would fail, or at least, the trade of such a proportion of romance-writers as endeavour to draw upon realities of nature and of life. Not to step aside from nature, but to represent the more romantic aspects of life: life in its more impassioned moods—lives that might be, perhaps, more than such lives as, often, are. Even life itself, if a happier, would become a far more monotonous and uneventful business.

I think Mr. Newnham was "good" beyond the average of goodness; not much beyond, perhaps, for in some directions in which he was

excellent, his excellence was, doubtless, owing to absence of temptation (temptation either of temperament or of circumstance) rather than to present and positive virtue. Still he excelled, I think, in some positive points to an extent that raised his character somewhat above the average standard of poor humanity. He had shown himself what is called "truly unselfish," that is, capable of preferring before his own the happiness of the one beloved—but here we surely enter upon a perplexed and perplexing region of thought or speculation. How can any one, loving much, have happiness in anything that is not the happiness of the beloved? Have happiness at the expense of the beloved? Have happiness even independent of the one beloved? Possibly we talk of sacrificing the impossible when we talk of sacrificing our own happiness to that of our beloved.

"Thank you for nothing," might be the comment of the beloved. "If you love me half as well as you profess, you can't be happy if I am miserable, and, therefore, you have nothing of happiness that you can voluntarily sacrifice!"

Still Mr. Newnham, as far as a mortal could, had acted, thought, loved unselfishly. Had he now worn out the power of unselfishness that was in him? Was his a virtue to thrive in shadow, and to wither in the sunshine of hope and

happiness? Or had he of it but a certain modicum now expended?

I suppose it is with all of us the case that there is a certain amount of temptation which we can resist, as mere unaided mortals, without need to have quickened in us that germ of the heroic, that spark of something beyond mere mortality which is, or should be, in all of us. Tempted beyond this measure, we either fail and yield, or, by God's good strong grace, we lift ourselves above ourselves, and attain, at least for the time, to the heroic stature.

Mr. Newnham was, by-and-by, tempted beyond what, as a mere unaided, uninspired mortal, he could bear. Would he rise to the heroic stature, and overthrow temptation? Or would he succumb? He believed in himself so far (as a man who has never been tempted beyond what he is able, whose life has been singularly deficient of inward experiences, is sure to do), that he believed that, recognized the right, he should not fail to be impelled to do it; but then about that right would he voluntarily or involuntarily deceive himself.

Everything had been going so happily. Viola was so gently, gratefully, tenderly loving. And into Viola's face was coming more and more of health, of hope, of happiness: youth was returning to her. There had been no fret or jar

between them. How should there be? No inward sensitive chord had been touched. There seemed to be such perfect unison. No question about which Viola cared having arisen. Viola had so many happy things to look on to, and for all of them, without exception, she would be indebted to Mr. Newnham. The winter abroad was to give years of new life to her father—would not these be Mr. Newnham's gift? It would be unspeakable delight to her darling Rosie, that enthusiast for all beauty and poetry, that heart-and-soul artist, who thrilled and brightened at the thought of Italy, and whose life seemed to be dancing within her at the happy prospects spreading before them. For this, was not Mr. Newnham to be thanked?

It did not occur to Viola to notice how prominent these secondary things were in her thinking. If, at any time, a half consciousness of this crossed her, she said to herself, with a light sigh,


“I am not a girl now, but a woman, no longer very young. If my lover is not always quite first with me, all the more my husband shall be.”

All went calmly on, calmly, contentedly, till within a week of Viola's wedding-day; then there was a whole day and half another day on which Mr. Newnham did not come to Orchard-

leigh. It was not his absence that disquieted Viola—she knew he had so very much to do—it was something in his face when he came. Viola was watching for him. When he rode up she thought him looking altered, changed, as it by illness, and unutterably sad, yet more noble than she had ever seen him. She had been very busy all the day before, and now had been thinking to herself reproachfully how little she had missed him, had been taxing herself for cold-hearted indifference and selfishness; and then, with hands closely grasping each other, had said, “But he shall not have a cold-hearted or indifferent wife, my patient, devoted, good, dear Vincent!”

He put up his horse, as he always did, poor old John’s avocations being more than enough for him, and joined Viola in the house-porch, into which she had come to meet him. Touched by his sad and suffering look, and under the softening influence of her tenderly-penitent thoughts, she received him with more demonstration of love in her tenderness than she had ever yet done; for generally any sharp discernor would have pronounced her calm affectionateness to be inconsistent with love—the love of love.

“I have been anxious,”—at the moment of saying that she thought it was true—“Vincent; and you look as if you had been ill!” She



lifted her face to his for the first time, and, as he stooped, and, for the first time, kissed her lips, she put her arms round his neck, questioning, "Have you been ill?" He looked into her eyes when she drew a little away again—there was a struggling agony in his. That expression of nobility and of unutterable sadness was broken up now and gone—it was replaced by a feverish excitement. It was Viola had banished it. Why should she, who had never been demonstratively loving; just this day lift her face to his, and put her arm round his neck when he stooped to her, and seem so bewilderingly fond? Why should she? That is just the perverse way of women, some would say, who, if they do a right thing, choose the wrong moment for doing it. But how was poor Viola to know that this wasn't the rightest right moment? Why not by that "instinct" of which, at times, we hear so much? The *rapprochement* between herself and Mr. Newnham was not close enough to be likely to bring that into play.

"Can we, for once, be alone together a little?" His tone in saying this revealed to her that he had often felt it to be a hardship that they never were alone together—except out-doors.

"Oh! Vincent, something is the matter!"

"Nothing you cannot cure."

"Come in here—into the drawing-room—

they are out—we can be alone.” She was trembling and pale.


They went in together, and he closed the door.

“Love, I have frightened you!” He, trembling, reverently, for support, put his arm round her.

“You look so ill, Vincent—as if something had happened to you; and you spoke as if something, something terrible had happened to you!”

“I have had a nervous panic. Don’t laugh at me, it is not often I am nervous.”

“I am not inclined to laugh at you.” And Viola seated herself by him on the sofa in the oriel window, and left her hand in his. He leant his elbow on his knees, supporting his head with his hand, and looked at her. And how he grasped her hand! She was dressed more carefully than usual, and had his favourite colour in her soft, dark hair. Of late years she had been careless of dress—not slovenly or ungraceful, but wearing her dresses on and on, without thought or care, after they were shabby; as, indeed, if she had cared, it would have been difficult for her not to do, scarce as money always was. Now she had on one of her new dresses—a soft cashmere, of a neutral tint, that admirably brought out the delicate richness of





her complexion ; and in her hair she had a rich red rose-coloured ribbon. Mr. Newnham liked “something bright.”

“Vincent, speak to me.”

“How lovely you are looking !” with a sigh that was almost a groan, and an accent of almost accusation.

“It is not that I want you to say to me, you know.” She smiled, and her colour deepened lovelily.

Still that look, and no speech.

“I shall think I have wounded you in some way—you look hurt. Are you hurt?”

No answer yet.

“Tell me, dear love”—(she had never before called him so fondly familiar a name, and she herself felt a little startled at the sound),—“have I hurt you?—have I grieved you? What is it? Oh! for the world I wouldn’t knowingly hurt you, you who are so good, so good, so dear, so dear, to all of us !”

The thought occurred to Viola that possibly she had, last time they were together, grieved him by some omission, or commission, some too-eager planning for her father and for Rosie, some carelessness about his wishes and his tastes.

“You frighten me !” she said, and shrank a little from him ; and she was a little frightened.

“Are you going to be very angry with me about anything? If I have been wrong, you will find me penitent.”

She tried to speak playfully, but if he were capable on such slight cause of so much offence and resentment—for so she began to read his strange look and mood—then——Suddenly he changed his attitude, he caught both her hands; with a passion he had never shown before, he began to question her. Was she content? he asked her. Was it no mistake that she could, that she did love him? Was she sure it was for her happiness that she should be his? His questions confirmed her in her notion, that in some way, by some carelessness, some inadvertence, she had deeply wounded him. Moved by his trouble, and wakened to consciousness of her many faults of omission towards him, of her always scanty, and, perhaps, often evil repayment of his devotion, Viola replied to him with soft earnestness, with generous warmth, with unhesitating tenderness, with loving humility. She was, in this mood, winning, captivating, irresistible. And he had loved her, loved her, loved her, when he had no hope of her love, when, for him, she was but an indifferent friend. Then smiling (smiling as she began to speak, glowing with earnestness before she finished), she said,

"I could almost return your questioning, Vincent. Are you satisfied? Are you sure you do not repent? Dear love, dear love, how can I, for a tithe of all you are doing and planning for us, ever repay you? If I did not feel that I love you, if I did not hope to be a loving wife to you, if I did not know a little, if you had not taught me to know a little of what my love is to you, how could I suffer to be so indebted to you? You do not think so meanly of me as to think that, if I did not love you——" She couldn't finish, for he caught her to him, pressing her against his heart. And there was a close strain in his pressure, such as there might have been had he been conscious of its being for the last time, as it was for the first, that he held her there. She withdrew herself as soon as she could, blushing and wondering, somewhat startled and disturbed.

"Forgive me," he pleaded; he believed he had hurt her. "I am nervous to-day, I, who know so little of nerves," he said, with a nervous laugh. "It seems to me so incredibly happy a thing to possess you, that I am beset by spectres threatening at the last, the very last moment, to rob me of you. I wish my day were to-morrow—to-day—to wait nearly a week before I am sure of you seems impossible!"

"Vincent, you, surely, should be as sure of me now as then!"

"Should be!" he echoed, with a sort of bitterness.

He got up and stood looking out of the window; he passed his handkerchief across his face as he did so, wiping the moisture from his forehead.

Viola was a little, just a little disquieted. Why, in what way, she did not understand. She watched him a moment, then she said,

"Vincent, I am sure you are ill." Her disquieting fears settled into this fear. He was so unlike himself, and he looked so excited.

"I think you are right," he said, speaking now more quietly, and returning to his place at her side. "But it is nothing, nothing that will not soon pass. My head aches, with a hammering sort of ache, and is hot. A little over-work, want of sleep, excitement. You who are so calm, have no notion what the hopes and fears of this time are to me. It will be all right with me—good heavens! how much more than right, when the next few days are safely past; and you are mine irrevocably."

She slightly shuddered at that last word of his, or at the way he said it; but it did not impress her as it might, had she not been anxious about him. She put her hand upon his forehead.

"It is hot," she said, with pitying tenderness.

"The dear, delicious hand," was his passionate exclamation.

Then he drooped his head, or she drew it down, till it rested against her shoulder, he holding her soft, cool hand still pressed upon his temples. So they remained a few moments silent and still. He was thinking, was there any ache, even that of conscience (which he recognized as the worst ache of all) which such rest could not cure?

"God knows I meant to do it. God knows I came here with my mind made up to do it! He also knows I cannot do it! Does he require of any of us to do what we are not able?" So he thought.

A sigh, a soft sigh of Viola's, checked the course of his thoughts. He instantly lifted his head, and looked into her eyes, suspiciously.

"Why did you sigh?"

There was a restless jealousy of her thoughts in his face, and in the manner of his question. Surely he must be very ill, about to be very ill, he was so utterly unlike himself.

"Why did you sigh?"

"Vincent, I can hardly tell you. I hardly know myself."

"Try and find out. I may be unreasonable, but I feel as if I must know."

Viola reflected—"As far as I know," she said,

"it was a sigh of hope—hope to make you happy in the future. I was thinking of the past—of you, of myself, and—yes, perhaps, of Lionel. I think, Vincent, I was jealous, for you, of the long years given to sorrow."

"Viola—is this true?"

When she had named Lionel, he had had a momentary mad fear that she was conscious of that letter—that letter from Lionel to herself, which, carried in his breast-pocket, was so near her.

"I will not say it is, or it is not. Thought is so complex, I will only say I should not say it if I had not thought it true." She spoke a little coldly, she felt a little aggrieved, displeased, and by this aggrieved displeasure at so small a blame she should have been warned. A husband's love will not, ever, be all sunshine of approval and admiration as is, sometimes, a lover's. If a woman begin married life with the expectation that she is to be always on a pedestal, and her husband worshipping at its foot, the sooner she disabuse herself of any such notion the better; for, till such time as she has done so, she has no chance of content or happiness. If a woman expects to be always able complacently to simper at herself flatteringly reflected in the mirror of her husband's admiration, she has in store for herself the bitterest disillusion. The

mirror in which a woman sees herself reflected, looking into her husband's mind is apt to exaggerate all chips, and flaws, and blemishes. About even the best women there are perversities and smallnesses which exquisitely pain men, and which they find it difficult to understand in any way reconcileable with their ideal of what a noble woman should be, of what their love would have their wives to be.

To bear bravely the needful dis-illusion of finding her uglinesses magnified, rather than her beauties flattered, a wife needs to have that great love which makes humble, which makes long-suffering, which asks little, and is content the less it receives the more to abound. It is only such greatness in love (and this, happily or unhappily, in a woman, is no way inconsistent with the perversities and smallnesses of which we have spoken) that can readily and gratefully accept as proof of love that would fain help her to work towards her own perfectness this magnifying of all specks and stains. It is only such greatness in love that can be not only uninjured but stimulated by such dis-illusion. A small love, or the love of a small nature, is quick to resent blame from the beloved. Viola's was not a small nature. Yet, surely, she had been sensitively quick to detect a tone that was not reverent and satisfied.

"I have offended you!" he said, "I am not fit to be with you. I am not myself to-day."

"If that were so," she answered, "you had better have nothing to do with a woman of such evil temper, or so little love as to be so quickly offended!" her answer was made lovingly—for the slight cloud had already past.

He did not stay long. He left her before Mr. Dalton and Rosalie returned. He said something of an important letter to be written by that night's post, of business to attend to.

"I shall be more myself when I see you to-morrow," he added. And he spoke as if the words meant more than they said. And his eyes, generally so frank, so quiet, such honest, kind eyes, flew off from Viola's, lifted to them questioningly.

"I shall be anxious, very anxious about you, Vincent. You, who care for everybody, don't take any care for yourself. It rained, I remember now, as you rode home the other evening, rained very heavily—we heard it beating against the windows. I daresay you got wet, and sat up in your wet clothes till you were chilled—now didn't you? You are ill in consequence, feverish and ill. Confess!"

"Yes, I remember, I did get wet. I was chilled—chilled to the marrow of my bones!" He shuddered, as if at the recollection of that chill.



"But," he added, with sturdy honesty, "I don't think that would have hurt me, I am so strong."

"It is well for you, you careless, imprudent man——"

"That I am to have someone to care for me. It is indeed well! I must, however, try to become a little less robust, in order to claim the luxury of being cared for."

"That is not what I was going to say. But, Vincent, be serious; if you have got a chill of that kind——"

"See if I am not well to-morrow! Darling! my heart and soul's darling!" and again he took her in his arms. "I must be off now."

He went. As he rode back to Newnham he said,

"If I know anything of myself, of the nature of my love for her, I would not, even now, for a moment hesitate to give her up, if I believed the sacrifice would be for her happiness—if—I could doubt of her love for me. And yet, my God! does not the way I am going to act show that I do doubt? Do I *dare* put her to the proof?"

Then he told himself that, as far as he himself was affected, he would have dared, but that he shrank from trying her strength, from troubling her peace, from risking the shipwreck of her new happiness. She was not strong; those

years of waiting and of grieving had greatly broken up her health, had sapped her strength. If some such trouble and conflict had to be over again, he thought they would kill her. Mr. Newnham was turned aside from his natural rectitude; both love and fear were swaying him. One would have said that it would have been Mr. Newnham's way, unhesitatingly, unpausingly, one-sidedly, and unphilosophically to have believed he saw the right, and to have done it, letting the consequences, such consequences as might, follow as they must and would. But passion now overmastered the mere man in him; he needed to call up the hero to overmaster passion.

Has any human being the right to judge for and to decide about the vital interests of another? A father for a child of mature years, a brother for a sister, a friend for a friend, a husband for a wife? Perhaps a husband for a wife; because here the interests have no right to be separate and separable; and if they are so, are perhaps safest treated as if they were not so. Then, if a husband for a wife, why not Mr. Newnham for Viola, who just in a few days was to be his wife? Who, so he told himself, being consciously ready to be his wife, was indeed his wife, as much as if those days had passed, and the law already called her so.

"Oh! she loves me, she loves me!" he cried to his own conscience. "I am her natural protector, as much as if already I were her husband; for she loves me, she loves me!"

Had he not seen her appear to thrive and strengthen under the influence of his love and of her loving? Had he not watched the re-awakening of her interests in things that would not interest the unhappy? Had he not seen her spirits lighten and brighten day by day? Had he not known that she looked forward hopefully to a useful, noble, happy life at his side? Each day he had left her he had been more satisfied for her, more rapturously happy in himself. And she, to-day, had surely welcomed him as no true woman would welcome any man she did not love. And Viola was true among true women! And now what voice, that was not a direct voice from heaven, could persuade him that it was his duty to imperil her happiness and his? To throw both her and himself into a chaos of darkness and confusion. He might have known that, if this happiness could be so imperilled, why, then it was built on no safe and sure foundation, was but a show and a semblance, and no real thing. But how many things there are in life that, looking back on life, we feel we "might have known," and that yet we did not, or would not know, till the

time at which the knowledge, could anything have availed us, was for ever gone.

Philosophizing, speculating, Mr. Newnham was entirely out of his element. A quick seeing of the moral right and a quick doing of it, through the reasonable convictions of rectitude, was what one would have looked for from Mr. Newnham: was especially what Mr. Newnham would have expected from Mr. Newnham. But a strong spirit was in possession, and the aid of a stronger than it was needed to cast it out.

“Nothing is yours, if what you fancy is yours is so held that you dare not put the tenure on which you hold it to the test.” .

He would not hear these words.

## CHAPTER II.

## FOUND WANTING.

THIS is what had happened to Mr. Newnham to overcloud his happiness with doubt, just at its noon—to trouble to their depths the waters of a hitherto clear conscience, and to darken their surface with the darkness out of that cloud. On that last evening when he had left Viola, to ride, late, home to Newnham, through driving mists of early autumn rain, he had been jubilant, exultant, conscious of the deepening tenderness of her voice and of her eyes, and drawing from this the happiest, most honeyed promise. Pretty well wet through, but all aglow, within and without, with happiness and with exercise, he went to his library on reaching home, to see if any unusual chance thoughtfulness of his man's, or of the housekeeper's, might have put him a fire.

“No.” He smiled to himself quite pleasantly as he saw the black and empty grate. “One must have a wife if one wishes to be cared for,” he said.

He rather liked to contrast the present desolate discomfort with the bright warm homeliness that was to be. As he stood with his back to the fireless grate, and thought of what was to be, his eye fell upon letters lying on his writing-table. For some time he looked at them with unseeing eyes, and, the while, went on with his own thoughts; then, still half lost in those thoughts, he took the letters, one by one, and opened them. Business letters of little importance—some of them of interest, however, because they were connected with the happy future, concerned decorations and improvements to be made at Newnham while they (which meant its master and mistress) were abroad; others were of interest, because they had to do with Mr. Dalton's affairs. Unknown to every one, Mr. Newnham was endeavouring to buy Mr. Dalton out of the speculations in which he was entangled, from which he was utterly helpless to extricate himself. His object in doing this being that the small income which still remained to him should remain to him, so that the gentle old man, once so proud, should not need ever to feel himself his son-in-law's pensioner. This part of Mr. Newnham's correspondence slightly annoyed him. At another time, a time of less happy pre-occupation, the annoyance would have been more than slight. Mr. Newn-

ham was a man of keen business instincts, and did not like to be imposed upon—did not like that people should think of him as a man who could be imposed upon ; and it was clear to him he could not carry out this wish of his without being considerably imposed upon—without paying very dear indeed for his gratification. Last of all he took up a letter written on thin foreign letter-paper, but bearing no foreign post-mark. He looked at it with curiosity, with a certain sort of foreboding, and of aversion. By degrees he recognized the hand, though it was changed from what he had formerly known it. When he had recognized that, he tore the letter open. There fell out of it, to his feet, a letter addressed to Viola. Mr. Newnham picked up Viola's letter ; he held it clutched in his closed fist as, going to the table, drawing the lamp close, for his eyes seemed dim, he read what was addressed to himself.

He read it. Having read it, he looked up into a changed world. The fireless chill and desolation of the room were no longer pleasant, as throwing into cheery and warm relief a picture of his future. Hope and happiness, and ease of heart and soul, a quiet conscience, a certain amount, even, of self-approbation, had all been his ten minutes since : would they never all be his again ? Now there was fear, mistrust,

perplexity—these fully recognized. Hovering in the air something far worse. Something of which the dark wings already coldly overshadowed his soul, fanned him with blasts of utter loss, ruin of all happiness, despair.

The letter touched him, too. His was not a hard heart. Lionel Beverley had been his friend, and had always trusted him—had put more trust in him than one man in a thousand will put in another: was now putting more trust in him than one man in a thousand would put in another. And this letter was as the wail of a despairing remorseful spirit, questioning if the gates of Paradise are wholly closed against it.

The letter was an appeal for news of Viola. It was dated from the island, and had been written many months since.

“I write to you, Newnham, and not direct to her, entrusting myself to you, instead of trying to reach straight to her, in case she should be, even now, your wife. In which event, God knows, I would not trouble her. Knowing, as I do, your worth, and the unselfishness of your long devotion; knowing my own real worthlessness, and apparent absence of truth and faith, I cannot blame her if she is now your wife.” (“Blame her! Indeed I should say not,” was Mr. Newnham’s comment. “What slightest suspicion of blame-worthiness is there about my



Viola ?")—"And yet, through all, in spite of all, I have a hope, a faith, that she is mine still, as I am hers. I am impelled, at the last moment, before the going out of the mail, to write to her as I have written ; it is an entirely unpremeditated act ! I am impelled to do this, before I know how things will end for me, merely pleading to her to wait—a little longer.

"It is only quite lately that I have learnt to know all the fiendish work of the serpent who crept into my bosom against my will. Indeed I suspect I don't yet know all her treachery. But I must be silent about her. Good God ! if I could put her out of my past, as I will put her out of my future ! I write in such haste I hardly know what I say. I must know the truth about my true Viola. If she is free I will be free ; if it cost me the last penny I have earned, the last drop of my blood, I will be free, even if only to come and die a beggar at Viola's feet. I know that for more than I have sinned against her I could win her forgiveness. Dying at her feet, her love would make me live again. Any way, I am coming home, but not quite yet. If she is free she will write to me ; there will be time for one letter first. If she is not free, if she is your wife, burn the letter I have written to her, and take my word that I will not come near her to trouble her."

Mr. Newnham spent the night in his library with that letter of Lionel's lying before him. Sometimes he moved to and fro, sometimes stood for half an hour at a time motionless, the chill of his damp clothes, and of his dying happiness, creeping into the marrow of his bones. That "If she is still free, I will be free." What did that mean? Would he murder Caspian? If so, should Viola marry a murderer? Would he divorce Caspian? If so, should Viola, his pure Viola, be married to a man who had gone through the mud, the exposure, the infamy, needed for such a step. Should he relinquish his fair bride, and with her every happy hope of his life, to a man so muddled and sullied, so soiled.

"If she is still free."

Viola was not free! She was his, his wife, in all but the name, for she loved him, she loved him, she loved him! Well, and if she loved him, of what was he afraid? If she loved him, Vincent, first and best, what had he to fear? Why this despair?

"In the name of all you hold sacred, in any event but that of Viola's being already a wife (whether yours or some other man's), see the enclosed safe in her hands."

He imagined, for a moment, that he would do this. He tried to imagine what would happen if he did this. Might he not, by doing this, be

so glorified in her eyes that the light of his splendid self-sacrifice, or of his sublimed faith in her, should blind her to all else? Deafen her to any pleading of that letter? Keep the door of her heart closed against softening memories of the past?

No, no, no! He looked at the letter he held in his hand, and he believed it would be a talisman, a spell of bewitchment, to win her back to her old love, heart and soul, for ever and ever. If he, in the midst of his own misery, could be touched to sorrow for Lionel, by Lionel's letter to him, what must not Lionel's pleading to the woman who had so loved him, be able to effect. And—it could not be for her happiness that she should be so won back. So he dared swear to his own heart that he believed. Lionel asked her to wait—for what? The law's delays while he tried to put away his wife? Good heavens! as if she had not in her life had enough of waiting. And of course his notion of Viola, his Viola, as he had, at last, learnt to think her, waiting to marry a divorced man, was repugnant, abhorrent to Mr. Newnham.

He would not allow himself to believe in Lionel; in any constancy, any sincerity, any purity of heart or life remaining. He tried to see in his writing now a proof of the most repulsive selfishness. He had heard wild reports and ru-

mours about Lionel; he chose, at this moment, to believe them all, even the worst. Should he run the chance that his fair, pure Viola, who now loved him, Vincent, with such a quiet, happy, home-like love, should be swept into the storm and hurricane, and made to breathe the hot volcanic blasts of Lionel's life? Should take her hand from his, Vincent's, which, though rough and unworthy enough, heaven knew, was clean, and put it into Lionel's polluted, perhaps, even, blood-stained?

What was this Lionel, that he should ruin all the long-awaited for and hardly-won hope and happiness of another man's life? Was nothing due to him, Vincent Newnham? Did he owe nothing to himself? Had he any right to throw his own life away? If it were for Viola's happiness! If it were for Viola's happiness. But was he, Vincent Newnham, born into the world with no claim for a life of his own, no happiness of his own? Was he always to set his own heart under another's feet?

That night was passed in a to and fro of more passionate feeling than Mr. Newnham had ever yet been roused to and racked by. All the next day, different spirits fought within him, and neither was quite vanquisher. But by next morning he believed himself, the heroic element in him, to be the conqueror. He wrote to

Viola, enclosing to her Lionel's letter; but then he told himself that was a coward's act—he would see her, he would speak, face to face, what he had to say. He went to Viola. Feeling her lips against his lips, her arm thrown round his neck, he broke down. Returning from her, he wrote to Lionel—an honest letter; and its honesty soothed his conscience. Honesty was safe, too, for he should have been married to Viola some weeks before it could be possible to Lionel to act upon that letter. He said, "Your letter, Beverley, came into my hands just six days before the day appointed for my marriage with Viola. Possibly I am a coward, but I have wrestled with my soul, and I cannot trouble her peace, giving her your letter—I cannot. She loves me, she is serene, content, at rest, after long years. I cannot trouble her peace. It will be easy to you to say, 'Either she loves you or me. Let her know the truth, and choose between us. If, indeed, she loves you, she is yours still; if not, what have you lost that was yours?' I cannot resolve to stand this test. I cannot! I am weak; I am a coward. You will be angry, you will be contemptuous; but, God help me, I can do no other! How can I think of my wife—I have so looked upon her since I had her promise—as becoming yours? Even if you are free to have a

wife, what are you that you should claim this fair, pure, true woman as wife? You ask her to wait. Good Heavens! she has waited the best years of her life—almost worn out life in waiting! For what should she wait now? To see if it is possible you can, one way or another, get free to marry her!”

So he wrote—the honesty of this letter soothed him.

If, even at the last, Viola had seemed tremulous, doubtful, afraid, then—or so he thought—he might, even at the very last, have told her of that letter; but, fair, calm, beautiful with a sort of dream-beauty, with a holy light of loving trust in her sweet eyes, the bride was worthy of the exquisite September morning, the morning of the bride. The day came and went, and Viola Dalton was Viola Newnham!

It was Rosalie who was tremulous, half doubtful, half afraid; Rosalie who thought much of Lionel. She had so often pictured to herself the time when she should see Viola and Lionel stand in the light of the great window, before the altar, in the dear little old church—that to see this picture, which had been for years so present to her mind, to see the whole scene just as she had fancied it, only a different bridegroom, troubled her, with a curious sort of trouble.

There were a few, a very few spectators in the church.

"One would, or, at least, I would, bet largely on the chances of happiness for both parties in such a marriage as this!" remarked one of these few spectators. "It is not a marriage of youthful passion, made in haste to be repented of at leisure; nor is it a marriage of interest or convenience, but one of matured affection, mutual esteem, calm hope of a happy, active, useful life."

A younger voice repeated those last words somewhat mockingly, adding,

"In the bride's face I should have fancied that I could read something more than what you have enumerated could quite satisfy—capabilities for something different, more ideal; aspirations with which that very excellent Mr. Newnham could not sympathise; a tendency to go into what he would call extremes. As to Mr. Newnham himself, he does not look as I should have expected him to look on the happy occasion—he looks wanting in self-confidence; nervous, as if he half expected hostile interposition."

"Excuse a man for being a trifle nervous at such a crisis of his fate. As for the bride's fair face, what you fancy expressed in it is, maybe, but inherited expression: an expression left by the character of her grandmother, possibly, ac-

according to the theory of our first modern novelist ; or, perchance it is the impression left there by some passion that suffered itself out in her early youth."

"Under thirty, a woman can hardly safely conclude herself to have done with passion."

"Miss Dalton is, I fancy, close upon, if not past thirty."

"She looks five-and-twenty—not more."

"She is, I know, ten years older than that most lovely sister of hers ; and she is no child."

"As for the bridegroom, what a fine-looking fellow he is, so honest, so hearty, so wholesome-looking, so kindly ; and yet, I should say, a man who, with the best intentions, would drive his wife nearly mad if she were of a type not to sympathise with him, or to need sympathies he could not give, as Miss Dalton's grandmother would have done."



## CHAPTER III.

## LEAVING HOME.

VIOLA, when it came to the last, was frightened to find the rending agony—the phrase is not too strong—caused her by the thought of leaving Orchardleigh, never to return to it as to her home. Did all brides feel this, or anything like this, she wondered? Not young girl-brides, she thought. She was not young, and she had always loved Orchardleigh with passion. She was forced, as far as possible, to put all thought of all kinds away from her, and all feeling. What was the use of much thinking, now, at the last; had she not thought, and thought, and thought, while it was yet time, but now the time for any thought that implied doubt or hesitation was past. When Rosie came softly creeping into her room in the night—the night before the wedding—saying, “I can’t sleep, Viola. I see you are not sleeping—may I stay with you?” Viola felt obliged to refuse her.

“If you stay, darling child, we shall speak of things—and I am forced to hold myself in, to

be as quiet as I can. I am not very strong now, you know, Rosie, dearest, getting old, I think, and if I once give way—You understand, and for papa's sake it is so important that we should all be very quiet to-morrow."

Rosie did not remonstrate, she kissed her sister in her softly passionate manner; said, "I can't sleep, Viola, so if you think of anything you want to say to me, darling, call me and I will come," and went away.

Rosie went away sighing, why she could not tell, and thinking—

"Oh! if only it had been Lionel! How different it would all be! How happy I should be!"

The happy agitation of the wedding-day—he was the happiest person of them all—shook Mr. Dalton greatly. The parting from Viola, though, according to their plans, it was only for a couple of weeks, though it was under such happy conditions, and with the prospect of such a delightful afterwards, tried him extremely. Viola left him with a sadly anxious heart. She almost pleaded to stay a day or two in the neighbourhood; but the pleading rising in her heart did not pass her lips—she felt as if it must not, as if she would be most selfishly exacting to ask now—any more. She must leave off asking, receiving; must grant and give.

As long as it was possible to see anything of Orchardleigh, Viola leant from the carriage window. As long as it was possible to see anything of the carriage, the grey-haired, bent old man, supported on one side by the slight, muslin-robed, white-veiled figure of the lovely Rosie, on the other by the servant Nancy, while John stood near, close behind, remained at the gate. It was one of those exquisite September days, when the world seems transfigured, held in some dream-spell. The sunshine of the afternoon, as Viola looked back upon the place, seemed something more than, and different from, mere earthly sunshine; a flood of broad, clear, pure, mellow light, glorifying everything. Orchardleigh, as if to quicken Viola's regrets, was looking its very loveliest, an enchanted glamour was over everything belonging to it, its queer old roofs and quaint chimneys, its lichened eaves and heavy-browed gleaming windows (looking like kind eyes glancing out from under stern over-hanging brows), its masses of climbing roses and vines, its nestling orchards and rich orchard-grass, the great meadow and the old barns, the meadow-gate, with its overhanging ash and near group of majestic old walnuts, the tall, rook-inhabited elms in the lanes about it, every bank and blade of grass; all seemed to blend to a mellow harmony, and yet to stand

in a clear distinctness of beauty. And over all there was a pathos, a something that made Viola feel as if, never before, and never again, over any earthly scene, would there be that same touching beauty.

And Viola's heart clung to her home, the home of her youth, of her youthful happy love and life, and the hands of her spirit stretched back towards it, and almost compelled her physical hands to do likewise; and there settled down on her a heavy sickness of dread and apprehension. In all the beauty of the scene there seemed to her to be appeal—an inimitable, unutterable, sorrowing sadness of appeal. Her spirit was stirred within her, her heart was troubled, and her soul afraid. She felt as if she had been held in a dream, and, in that dream, had taken the irrevocable step, as if the dream-mists were beginning to stir and clear, and to let the truth of what it was she had done through to her. She was startled to find herself recoiling in spirit from her husband's passionate grasp of her hand, from his passionate voice and face, as he exclaimed—

“Mine, and only mine, at last—all well over!”

It horrified her to find that she kept thinking of Lionel. It was as if he called to her. You see Viola's was not now a quite sound and healthy mind and life. She was subject to

morbid mental action and reaction. The suppressed excitement of the last few days was telling upon her; she felt as if the skin had been scraped afresh off old wounds.

"Oh! my God! what have I done?" she cried in her soul.

All this within a few minutes. They were out of sight of Orchardleigh then, and would soon pass in sight of Newnham. Mr. Newnham was looking towards his own place.

"The old things left behind now, I want your attention for the new, Viola," he said, turning to her with a smile; then he questioned her, asking, whether the old porch should be left as it was?—exactly where she would wish the new conservatory? and so on.

And Viola looked, and smiled, and answered,

"I am always for leaving old things as they are, Vincent: old houses, old trees, old gardens. I should certainly let the porch alone. It seems to me the best thing about the house. As to a new conservatory, the old ones have been so good to me so long, I don't think I could care for a new one."

As she answered this, she was saying to herself—"Yes, the old things are left behind. I will steadily set my face towards the new—my face and my heart also."

"You don't like Newnham, Viola?"



"I don't love it yet as I love Orchardleigh. It is hard, and large, and grand, compared with Orchardleigh, which is so homely and so cozy." And Viola, looking at the stately, substantial, unattractive mansion, gave a little involuntary shudder.

Later in the day—they were then travelling by rail to Dover, and they were alone—Viola said,

"Vincent, there is a painful spell upon me—try to break it for me."

He waited for her to go on: she did not immediately. She seemed to struggle a little with herself; then she said, in the most suppressed voice—

"I keep thinking of Lionel." As she said that name—said it, perhaps, more softly than she knew—a flush crossed Mr. Newnham's forehead. "Not thinking of him," she went on, "as if he were alive, but as if he were dead, and from some other world kept bidding me good-bye. There, now I have spoken, I don't doubt it will be different. Don't look so shocked, so pained, or I shall feel that it was terribly selfish of me to tell you. It was out of my immense trust in you that I spoke—my knowledge how lovingly you interpret me—my certainty that you wouldn't misunderstand me." Then she went on, with an intense earnestness,

taking one of his hands in both of hers—"Vincent, whatever happens—whatever pain or sorrow come to us—some time, of course, pain and sorrow will come, even to us,"—that smile with which she said "even to us," was a wonderful one: what it meant, who could have told?—certainly not Viola herself, and, even more certainly, not her husband,—“let us always, I beg of you, be true with each other: let us have no secrets, no concealments—you from me, or I from you. Absolute truth will be our safety.”

Poor Mr. Newnham writhed at her words.

“My dear girl, what special dangers do you apprehend? You are over-tired and over-wrought, Viola, and inclined to be fanciful.”

Something in Mr. Newnham's tone, as he said this, made Viola feel already the new relationship in which they now stood to each other. She felt hurt, without knowing why, pushed back; it was soon to be made to feel this—soon to be made to feel herself spoken to as by a superior to an inferior; soon to hear that word, which probably in the future she might hear often enough, that word “fanciful,” applied to her mood. She had, she thought, over-trieved her husband by that foolish mention of her foolish—worse than foolish—thoughts of Lionel. She did not blame him, but she was disappointed, pained.

Viola leant back in a corner of the carriage, and feigned to sleep, glad of the darkness that hid the tears, bitter tears, that welled up and overflowed—tears she did not herself understand, and that certainly her husband would not have understood. They were, perhaps, tears of wounded pride, as well as wounded feeling, but they were bitter.

The fact was that those words of poor Viola's had touched Mr. Newnham on a sore place. Already the burden of that concealment galled him. Lionel's letter to himself, the superscription of Lionel's letter to Viola—these things were constantly before his eyes.

While Viola shed tears, and feigned sleep, her husband was lost in painful thought and apprehension. If, at any time, by any accident, Viola should learn, not from himself, or if, at some time of feverish illness, she should learn involuntarily from himself of this letter held back from her—a letter that might have changed all her life—a letter the withholding of which showed the weakness of his faith in what alone could have justified him in letting her make herself his wife in ignorance of it—if, at any time, and especially if not by any voluntary confession of his, she should learn this act of his, what would she think of him? Would she be able to forgive him?



Mr. Newnham resolved, or believed that he resolved, that to guard himself against such accident, he would, at some time—it might be weeks, or months, or years hence—some time when he felt specially sure of his wife's entire love; some time when he felt specially sure of the indivisibility of their interests—tell her the whole story; and so, afterwards (as he never should before), live fearless of all shocks and accidents of life that might make unseasonable disclosures. And yet to do this would be intolerably—all but intolerably—painful. Mr. Newnham, devoted, reverent, unselfish lover as he had been, had his own views, and pretty strict and stern, and very old-fashioned views, of the duties and mutual relationships of husband and wife. That a husband should confess to a wife, ask forgiveness of a wife, was hardly consistent with these views.

The more Mr. Newnham exercised himself in thought, the more he realized what he had done, the more he regretted what he had done—the more unworthy, both of him and of Viola, the more foolish, he felt the course he had taken to have been. If, indeed, Viola loved him, what difference could that letter have made—that wild appeal of a man become utterly unworthy of her, and who could only reach her by crime—for as such Mr. Newnham regarded

divorce. If Viola did not love him, Vincent Newnham, why, then, the rousing of her nature to this knowledge in time was the best thing that could have happened for either of them. Better for them both to live always lonely, than to come together and still feel lonely. To come together only to feel always a something, a spectre, a shadow, between. He was not a man to be satisfied with appearances, with the forms and shows of love; he wanted all of Viola, as far as he could understand her—the love of her heart and her soul and of her very life. And from the chance of proving if indeed these could be his, he had turned aside! Not daring to stand the proof.

And yet Mr. Newnham, even while having all this, and more, pass through his mind, knew that in all probability, if things were to do again, he should only be able to do as he had done. Knowing this, it became necessary to him to justify himself to himself: to try and persuade himself that he might take a high tone; to try and believe in his right to protect Viola against herself—against bewildering memories and deceitful imaginations.

Viola would have noticed, more than she did notice, the want of happy ease and radiant content in her husband, and his constant restless watchfulness of her, had she not been a good deal pre-occupied.

"I cannot shake off the idea that papa is ill—that something painful is going to happen at Orchardleigh," she said to her husband when they had been three or four days in Paris. She recalled many slight signs and symptoms of change in his state: she could hardly keep herself from pleading that they should return.

"I will telegraph to Orchardleigh, if you think I can do so safely—I mean without risk of bringing about some of the evil you fear by alarming your father."

"It is very good of you to be so patient with my fancies, Vincent; I will try and make it up to you," Viola answered with soft sweet humility.

"Try to take it as a natural thing that your husband should be good to you and patient with your fancies, Viola, and do not always talk to me of repayment, and of making it up. Don't be so grateful!"

"It is hardly possible I should not feel conscious of a great debt of gratitude."

"You would not if you loved me more."

"I am going to love you more and more and more," she said sweetly, but the tears had rushed to her eyes at the tone he had used. Already she was perplexed, disappointed: the man she had married seemed so different from the man who had been her lover. It cost her a great

effort to speak sweetly then. She was intensely weary, weary in mind and body, especially the former. They had been passing the last two days chiefly in the Louvre. Mr. Newnham had been conscientiously "doing" the whole collection—of course liking his wife to be always at his side; he had pronounced his judgment upon most of the pictures—his remarks were so entirely those of a man who understood nothing of what he saw, in any sense below the superficial surface, that Viola had been conscious, before half her penance was over, of a bewilderment of aching weariness, and, alas! conscious, too, that she had not been able to keep remembering one or two picture-seeings with Lionel in London, when his few suggestive words had been enough to bring out before her all the quality and all the meaning of such pictures as had either—so that the picture, or at least the better part of it, came to her from him. By what strange perversity, she had asked herself, was it that now, since she thought that to think of Lionel was almost, if not quite, crime, Lionel was more present to her imagination than he had been for years?

She felt as if this question, asked inwardly, was answered outwardly, with a terrible startling distinctness, when, as they were driving back to the hotel, there flashed on her from the

window of a fast-driven cab a face that was Lionel's, and yet not Lionel's (so it seemed to Viola), changed as to the flesh from Lionel's, aged and worn, and the glory of it darkened; but yet, from which had looked forth Lionel's self. His eyes did not seem to meet hers. She started and shivered perceptibly; her hand was in her husband's—he had put his on hers as they got into their carriage, saying, "I have kept you too long—you look sadly tired." And she had clasped his hand with a clasp that was one of penitence, penitence of that lassitude. Now, when he turned quickly on her and asked what was the matter, she had not the courage to pain him by telling the truth. She said she had shivered, being cold, only cold with tiredness, which would soon pass off.

"I don't think Paris suits you, or you wouldn't so soon be so exceedingly tired."

"I don't think it does."

"We will go on to-morrow, if you like. About the telegram—shall I send it?" he asked, after there had been a few moments of silence.

"Perhaps we shall have letters this evening that will set me at ease."

They got no such letters; but, quite late on the next day, they got a telegraphic message, begging them to return to England, to Orchardleigh, instantly, as Mr. Dalton was very ill.

Now, in reality of trouble, Viola felt not only all the goodness and tenderness of her husband, but the practical value of his right-handed ability for management; he thought of everything, did everything, so arranged that they lost no five minutes unnecessarily in travelling home, and that she had no one fatigue or discomfort which money or most minute forethought could spare her. A thousand times she was on the point of saying, "How good, how very good you are to me!" but she checked herself, remembering that he had reproved her for this expression, that it pained him. But she rewarded him a thousand-fold, he thought, he felt, by seeming to find comfort in holding his hand, in resting her head against his shoulder, in having his arm round her, in looking up into his face when she woke at dawn, cold and sick and ill, from a short sleep; as they were flying from London westward. He was so wise as to attempt no spoken consolation, to say nothing of hope; only to do all that money and care and effort could do to get her quickly home. He saw in a moment, when they dashed up to the door at Orchardleigh, how it was. He half-lifted Viola from the carriage, and left her in Rosalie's arms.

•

## CHAPTER IV.

## TOO LATE!

THEY reached Orchardleigh too late. Mr. Dalton had died the night before; and yet they reached it almost too soon, arriving sooner, by many hours, than any calculation made there had made it seem possible they should arrive. For Viola there remained of her father only a placid, dead face, that would never again give her back loving look for loving look—a face so placid, of which all careful lines were so relaxed, that, in spite of silvered hair, youth seemed to have come back to it—only a cold, unanswering hand for her to press, a hand would never clasp hers again; only cold, unanswering lips to kiss, lips would never kiss hers again. At her vehement entreaty, Viola had been allowed, on the first evening of her return, to go alone to her father. She turned the key in the door, locking herself into his room. For a long time she sat beside him, tearless, feeling at her heart a cold despair. It was a bitter blow—a dull, dead, blank ending.

to so much bright hope. Instead of resigning itself as to natural and inevitable loss, her heart rebelled within her. She seemed to see, stretching away before her, a future of black nothingness. Perhaps now, she first recognized, what she had before only at times and feebly suspected, how far in her decision to marry Mr. Newnham she had been influenced by her hopes and dreams for her father. And so ended all these hopes and dreams; and so, it now seemed for her, all light died out of life. It was almost new life, almost youth, power of body and of mind that Viola had dreamt of winning back for her father. Power of mind, ability to use his brain, things dearer to him than life, she had dared hope might return to him when all the conditions of his life were favourable, and the air he breathed should be to him an elixir of life. In the old times how often had he said, "If only I could finish my work, I should die happy!" And Viola's extravagance of hope had even included the realizing of this aspiration. And now, there he lay! Could she, looking on his placid face, doubt that it was well with him? That he had died happy? The haunting idea of those laboriously-accumulated masses of manuscript, the fruit of fifteen, perhaps nearer twenty years of thought and of deep scientific research, lying useless and idle, did not torment him now. The



work was dead, as he was, useless for the purposes of this world as he was, yet he took it with him, he took with him the disciplined spirit that having worked in patience, had then learnt the harder lesson, to be patient of inability to work. Life had taught him both to labour and to wait. No doubt his life-work had fulfilled itself, though so differently from anything he had hoped and planned. Oh! that it was well with him Viola could not doubt—but with her? Had she not paid her price and been cheated of her reward? And should not all who pay such price be cheated of reward? Or, rather, is not such price always paid in coin so false that it deserves no reward? Viola started inwardly, and inwardly shrank to find so terrible a thought occurring to her, to find her grief so hard, so bitter, so repining; to find her conscience so terribly accusing her.

Above her breath Viola cried, “No, no, no! I married my husband because I believed I loved him. Nothing could have made me marry him if I had not believed I loved him!”

She tried to follow this up by saying—“And I do love him!” but thoughts, perhaps rather a consciousness, rose in her that forbade these words. She changed them for “And I will love him!” As if love the great “lord of all” could be treated as a servant, to be at one’s nod and

beck, to come or to go at will! Even as she said those words, even while she sat there alone by her dead father, the thought of one who was neither father nor husband, and the phantom of whose face lately-seen had made her heart swell and burn within her, flashed blindingly across her mind.

“My God, help me!” was the outcry of a great agony of alarm as that flash (of which she might have thought as of light from hell, had it not seemed to come from Lionel’s face!) lighted up and revealed to her a troubled sea of fathomless anguish, and horror, and wrong, Was she then, indeed, not merely a woman who did not love her husband, with that first and best of all love, which alone suffices from a wife to a husband; but a woman who, having a husband, loved a man who was not her husband? A man, too, who was another woman’s husband!

“My God, help me!”

She forgot herself, and this time, she cried that cry out aloud. It was by this time—for she had been already long in that room—the dusk side of twilight, and the cry rang sharply through the twilight silence, seemed to strike against the walls, and strike back on her. She listened, startled, lest any movement in the house should tell her that any one had heard her cry.

The house was as quiet as an empty house; or as the grave. She was alone with the dead; she might strive and cry, there was none to hear. None to hear! Not even that father who, from her childhood, had been so quick to hear her cry of trouble. And now there had come upon her a trouble, like no other trouble, a trouble that wrung from her very soul a cry for help, and he did not stir or speak; not lift a finger, or quiver an eyelid. Deep, deep indeed must be the peace of death, a sleep no dream troubles, through which not even pierces the cry of sorrow and pain from the beloved. Well, one day it would be hers, unto all is an appointed time. Presently a nervous terror seized her; it seemed to her almost as if her dead father did stir, might, in another moment, speak. She rushed to the door, more with a fear that she herself was going mad, than with any other terror; but she controlled herself immediately, and came back to the bed-side.

She bent her face down to the placid face; so white through the gathering dusk. She spoke softly.

"Father, you rest well. More and better than I could have done for you, God has done for you. You rest well, but, somewhere, I think you know the trouble of your child. Ask for her, from where you are, that help may be hers,

and strength, strength to stand and to withstand even in the hour of supreme temptation."

Viola knelt down by the bed-side, her cheek resting on the cold hand. Did she think she was drinking the bitterest of the bitterness of her cup? It was not so, she was doing little more than breathing on, and breaking the bubbles on its brim.

For a sweet woman, a gentle, soft-eyed, soft-voiced woman, one of those women in whom one does not look for pride, Viola was, perhaps, proud. To call the thing I mean in her pride, self-sufficiency, self-complacency, is, perhaps, to call it by names too harsh, and yet, perhaps, it was enough like these to demand that she should be baptized as with a baptism of fire, if she was to reach any ideal standard of charity and of humility.

There were points at which Viola, unconsciously, believed herself unassailable; regions of temptation which she, unconsciously, considered it impossible that she should enter; there were depths of sorrowful sinfulness into which, by no effort of imagination, could she realize it to be possible that she should plunge. Perhaps we all need to learn, if we are to attain to a fulness of tolerant charity for sinners (not for sin, but for sinners), that there is hardly a sin to which we have a safe right to say—"to me you are

impossible!" I don't for a moment mean to say that we are all alike prone to like sin. There are differences as between angel and devil; but I think that in all natures exist, in different proportions, the possibilities of all humanity; that it is the greater freedom from circumstances of temptation, or the fuller presence of the grace of God to aid us to resist temptation, not the impossibility of such a sin to such a nature, that enables some to escape untempted, some to resist temptation, while others are tempted and fall. If a woman believes herself (as, perhaps, unconsciously, Viola believed herself) born pure, so that temptation to sin would pass her by, in however anguished a manner she might suffer, that woman, probably, needs to be scorched in a fiery trial of temptation, from which her soul hardly escapes unscathed, before she can suffer and sorrow with fulness of charity and humility, for those who suffer and sin.

Viola to-day went through anguish and miserable self-torment, but she did not sound the depths. She realized that she was fallen far short of any high standard, but she did not realize how far there was the possibility that she might yet fall. She knelt there by her dead father, feeling crushed and humiliated, but she would have to bow her gentle head lower still. That she should ever, even in thought, fail from

outward, common, world-recognized duty to her husband, such poor duty as can be paid where the love of love is withheld; that she should ever, even in thought, fall into error, such error as all the common world of common people would recognize as error, through the power of that love of love given where it should have been withheld—these things did not appear to Viola as possibilities. Would she have to learn to think of them as such? She, Viola! Had she, unconsciously, believed herself to be one of those gifted

. . . "by God's gift of a purity of soul  
That will not take pollution, ermine-like  
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow?"

Would she, if so, have to unlearn this belief, to wash it out in a penitent's tears?

Viola, with a stifling sense of want of air, presently went to the window; throwing it open, she leant out. It was, it has been said, the dusk side of twilight. Some one, some man, was moving along the terraced garden-path that skirted the orchard. At first Viola thought it was her husband. At the noise made by the opening of the casement the figure paused; the face, turned towards her, and which, through the twilight, showed very pale, was uplifted, the hat raised, as if in farewell. Before she could remember how things were with her,

where she was, and who, she had stretched out her clasped hands towards that uplifted face with the cry, "Lionel!" It was a passionate ringing cry. He might not before have been really conscious of her, probably that farewell was to the house and to the idea of her, but that cry pierced to him. He paused, seemed to hesitate, then, turned off the path, plunging into the orchard, leaving the house as quickly as far behind him as possible.

The sound of her own voice had recalled her to herself; for an instant she turned to look back into the room, almost with the feeling of looking for the woman who had uttered that cry; then, looking out again, she saw no one—in that moment he had disappeared. She got back to the bedside, as for protection. She sank down there, the dusk thickened to darkness, and she had no power to move. That this was, or could be, Lionel in the flesh, was not a thought that occurred to her. Faintness increased upon her till she altogether swooned. And no wonder, for the body was no less strained and exhausted than the mind. And that last shock alone might have been enough. Mr. Newnham was away from the house on business, and so was Nancy, the sad business of the time, or she would not have been left alone so long. Poor little Rosalie, much worn out,

was supposed to be asleep. No one came near the room till Mr. Newnham, on his return, finding Viola still locked in there, getting no answer to his calls upon her, lost no time in forcing the lock. They found her lying in a helpless heap by the bedside. But she soon revived.


"She must not come here again," Mr. Newnham said sternly to the frightened faces round him, Nancy's and old John's. Rosalie was helping him to lift her sister.

"Oh! yes, Vincent, once more. It was not——"

She stopped, and shuddered convulsively, as she remembered.

"I forbid it!" he answered her, in a voice so new in him, that Rosalie looked into his face inquiringly. "She will kill herself," he answered to Rosalie's look.

By-and-by, when Viola was in bed, and sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion, Rosalie and Mr. Newnham were for a short time alone. Mr. Newnham was sitting by the fire, looking into it moodily, his head leaning on his hand. Rosalie had been resting on the sofa, watching him. Presently she got up and came to his side; she took a low seat close to him, and touched his hand. At that touch he started, and asked, "What is it?" He spoke as if already he knew something of what "it" was, and was displeased





at it, or as if he was irritated at the interruption of his thoughts.

"Is it right, are you sure it is right, not to tell her?" Rosie asked, in a suppressed voice, with an anxious face. "Even if it is right, is it safest, is it best? Wouldn't it be better that she should know all we know? If she learnt it by-and-by, by some accident——"

"My dear child, you must leave me to judge in such a matter."

"I do—I do willingly. Of course I trust you entirely. I know how truly and unselfishly you have always loved Viola. I have always felt you noble and grand in your loving of Viola. I only felt, somehow, obliged just to ask this question, this once."

"I answer you, just this once, and beg, my dear girl, that you will not again touch upon a subject which always, for me, from many sides, must be a most painful and distasteful one. I believe it is right and I know it is necessary to spare Viola. That swoon this evening shows how exhausted and overdone she is."

"Of course I know you are the better judge; I feel that, very likely, I had no right to speak to you on the subject. Only I have a fear that if, someday, she learns about Lionel, by accident, she may feel as if—as if we had deceived her."

"If any good could possibly be done by telling her: if there were any choice of conduct left open to her, I trust I might find strength, at any cost to myself, to be frank with her."

"I know you would," eagerly interposed Rosalie.

"You can't know, I can't know—we can none of us be sure how, if we are tempted, we shall act under temptation. Probably just the thing we should have said we could never do, is just the thing we should find ourselves doing—at least I can fancy it might be so."

Again Rosalie looked inquiringly at her brother-in-law; he seemed to her changed—different.

"But no good possibly can be done," he went on to say dogmatically, "great harm might be done, great pain any way would have to be inflicted and suffered, by speaking to Viola on this subject now."

"But, I. believed, though Viola would be pained, though she would suffer, it might be best in the end. She would feel so deeply grateful to you for your trust in her: she would so admire your truth with her——"

"You are pertinacious, young lady."

"Please to forgive me!"

"I forgive you, dear—I know you mean well. But I only can judge in this matter—I only

know all the circumstances. Viola needs repose—repose of mind and body—not fresh conflict and trial. She is a little morbid now, and inclined to over-questioning of her conscience. Were we to tell her what we know, I could even fancy that she might reproach herself that she had not been faithful, as she would call it, longer, that she had not waited longer. She must not be exposed to the chance of this self-torment. She is my wife now, and she must keep her mind free from regrets and memories. I am her husband, Rosalie, and it is my part to help her to do this. I fancy you hardly know how little physical strength your sister has now. I had no idea myself how weak she was. She was always tired, weary to death I am sure she looked and felt, when we were in Paris, though she would not own it.”

Rosalie was silenced, but not convinced, and she lived in fear lest some accidental word should betray the fact that Lionel had been at Orchardleigh. Just too late! Just too late! Rosalie was not only not convinced by Mr. Newnham, she was also disappointed in him. She thought that he acted weakly, and that he did Viola injustice.

Rosalie, worn as she was with watching and with sorrow, shaken by the shock that had surprised her, hardly yet, except at intervals, when

the sense of it burst on her freshly, realizing her loss, could not, nevertheless, keep her heart and mind free from the image of Lionel: such a different Lionel from the Lionel she remembered, and one who, if he appealed less to her admiration of beauty than he had done as she remembered him in the glorious brightness of youth, yet by the gaunt pathos of his face, the hungry despair of his eyes, haunted her imagination, and shook her soul with yearning pity. His voice as it had said "Viola!" and "Too late!" was always in her ears.

## CHAPTER V.

## TAKEN BY STORM.

ON the evening of the fourth day after Viola's marriage Rosalie had slowly and thoughtfully paced to and fro, and up and down, in Viola's favourite garden path, skirting the orchard, in the early twilight. Just while Mr. Dalton slept his short after-dinner sleep. Rosalie was dreaming happily of happy days to come, of the glories of Italy, of the vivid sunshine and vivifying air that were to make her father strong and well—was dreaming happily, and rejoicing in the soft warm beauty of a dry sweet-scented dusk that, as she walked and dreamed, deepened imperceptibly towards dark. Suddenly she found herself caught in strong arms, closely imprisoned, kissed with passionate kisses on the hair, the neck, the hands. Almost before she had time to be afraid, with personal fear, there came upon her another fear, and with it a trembling and a sorrow and confusion of heart that, at first, made speech impossible. For a voice, deep and hoarse with passionate feeling,

was crying over her, "Not too late, then—not too late! Viola, my own one! Not too late! Not too late for forgiveness, not too late for life, not too late for love! Thank God, thank God, not too late!" And a head was dropped upon her shoulder, and she was shaken with the sobs of a strong man.

Of course she knew now in whose arms she was. He had been too close for seeing before she had seen him approach, or her eyes might have made her doubt her other senses, the bearded man in the rough coat being so different from all her memories of Lionel. Knowing in whose arms she was—who it was wept upon her shoulder—Rosalie felt such a pity as stilled all the innocent maiden shame that otherwise might have overwhelmed her: such a pity as made her heart ready to die within her for his sorrow—for the shock awaiting him.

"Lionel—oh! Lionel," she began, when she could speak. "I am not Viola. Oh! why, why, why do you come too late?"

He lifted his head.

"Not Viola!"—Such a voice!—"And I am too late!" He held her at arm's length, and looked at her, saying these words slowly. "I see you are not Viola. Where is Viola?"

"Oh, Lionel!"

"For God's sake speak!—I am too late!"

"Oh! why, why, why," cried Rosalie, bursting into passionate tears—"why didn't you come back before—ever so little before—and you might have been in time!"

"I am too late, then?" Lionel dropped her hands and stood watching her. "Your sister is dead, or married?"

"Married," sobbed Rosalie, "and only four days ago."

There was silence. Great fear stilled Rosalie's sobs; she tried to see Lionel's face. He stood for some time perfectly still, looking at the ground. He pulled the glove off one hand presently, and stood looking intently at his fingers. He put on his glove again, evidently without the least notion what he was doing, and looked at Rosalie with the haggard eyes, that did not seem to see, which afterwards haunted Rosalie.

"Only four days ago, I think you said? Well, God pity me, it is only what I deserved."

He turned, and she thought he was going away so, without another word, and because her heart seemed breaking with pity, she couldn't find a word to say. He walked thoughtfully to the end of the walk, she standing looking after him; then he came back to where she was, stood leaning against a tree, looking towards her, but whether at her or not she could not tell.

"You are little Rosie?" he said quietly.

"Yes."

"I suppose you don't know much about things—you are too mere a child."

"I am grown-up now—I am not a child now. Perhaps I can tell you something of what you want to know; but not much. Viola was very silent when she was most unhappy, and was always afraid lest people should say hard things of you. She always tried that nobody should know how long it was since she had heard from you, or anything that could make them blame you."

"How long had she been engaged before she married? I suppose she has married Newnham?"

"Yes; they were engaged this spring; it was years since she had heard from you, Lionel, and——"

"No need to excuse her, child, to me. She is blameless and stainless in my mind." Then, as if to himself—"But she should have waited. If it had been for ever, she should have waited. Newnham can't make her happy—she should have waited."

"And I believe she would have waited for ever, if—if it had not been for other things."

"What things? Viola would never have married Newnham, if she had not believed she



loved him ; and when I think of his long devotion, I am ready to own she would have been unnaturally, unwomanly hard, had she not loved him."

"Still—but oh ! Lionel, it is no use to talk—she is his wife now, and——"

"Wise child !—it is no use to talk ; and yet there is one thing I should like to know." Then he paused. "Between the time of her engagement and her marriage, did no news of any kind, and no letter from me, reach her ? I daresay, however, you would not know. You were at school, perhaps."

"I could be quite, quite sure there did not. I left school a long time ago."

"And why can you be so very sure ?"

Rosalie hesitated ; he pressed for her answer.

"Because I have a feeling that, though Viola thought she loved Mr. Newnham, and, in a way, did love him, still she loved you always, Lionel, better than she knew ; and if she had thought or known—But," Rosalie said, suddenly remembering, "you are married. What could be the good of your coming back—of Viola's being free—of anything ?"

"Married ! If I have been married, if that is to be called marriage, such a marriage as that can be broken ! If she were still free I would soon have been free. I wrote to her to tell her this.

Doubtless, by some jugglery of that fathomless mystery of iniquity, the creature who calls herself woman, and my wife, that letter—possibly, also, former letters of mine, never reached Viola. It is the suspicion of this that has brought me here—too late—to see and to know, with my own eyes and mind—too late.”

Rosalie silently shuddered at the hate and the bitterness expressed by Lionel’s tone.

Lionel seemed to feel her shudder.

“Ah! poor child,” he said, “I shock you! You are shocked, perhaps, at the thought that I could have asked your pure, sweet sister to take my name; have asked an angel to bear a name which a devil had polluted.”

“If I was shocked, it was not that shocked me,” she answered softly.

“Though it is all no use now,” he muttered, “I would give more than my life for half-an-hour’s talk with Viola, to know the truth of things. Especially to learn what is the full measure of my wife’s iniquity. ‘My wife!’” he repeated to himself, in the same tone that before had made Rosalie shudder.

“Viola could not bear it?” Rosalie cried in alarm. “You won’t try to see her? Viola is not strong now, and is easily shaken, she has suffered so much. And, you see, she must forget you now.”

"Do you think I would hurt her—more than I have done—or try to trouble her peace with one thought of me, now it is too late. I am not a brute—though, no doubt, you have grown used to think me so."

"I have grown up to love you as a brother. I do love you as a brother. I would do anything, anything to be a comfort to you." Th said with hands wrung in very earnestness.

"God bless you, my sweet girl!"

Lionel still lingered. He asked her many questions about Viola, about Mr. Newnham about her father, leaning there talking now so quietly, that his quietness, more than anything else, gave Rosalie a strange dream-feeling of unreality about it all.

Rosalie by-and-by said,

"I should like you to come and see papa, only he is so ill now, we are obliged to keep him so quiet."

"I don't think I could have patience to see your father, Rosie——"

"Oh! yes, I know you would have patience and gentleness with him. He is so gentle, and so feeble now."

Just at this moment Nancy came running from the house calling on "Miss Rosie," in a voice of hurry and alarm.

Mr. Dalton had wakened from sleep very ill

or, he had not slept and had seen Lionel pass the window, and had received a shock. As Nancy, now, finding Rosalie talking in the dusk with a man with a great beard, whom she did not at first recognise, received a shock.

Lionel made use of himself by going immediately to summon the doctor. His verdict was so serious a one that Lionel could not bear to leave poor, pretty Rosie, without such comfort and help as he could be. He took her message to the telegraph-office next day; he was, in many ways, of use to her. He stayed at Orchardleigh that night, and the next night. He had meant to have stayed there a third night (Mr. Dalton being then dead) thinking it not possible Viola could arrive till the morning—and being touched exceedingly by poor Rosalie's grief and loneliness; but Mr. and Mrs. Newnham travelled faster than he had thought possible, and he actually was still at Orchardleigh when they arrived.

At the last, when Mr. Dalton was past hope, there was a touching meeting between him and Lionel; an explanation and reconciliation. He had been very good to Rosalie, more tender than he knew, for she was strangely like Viola. She seemed to him a mere child, and yet he learnt to know that, with a child's sweet simplicity of confidingness, she had more than a child's self-control and wisdom and power of endurance.

Rosalie's first burst of grief on losing her father had been soothed by Lionel; soothed as he might have soothed such grief in a sweet young sister; he treated Rosalie as he might have done had Viola been his wife, and yet, perhaps, also with a something more of tenderness, as if at times, her image confused itself with Viola's.

Lionel and Mr. Newnham met before Lionel left the neighbourhood. It was a mere accidental encounter, for which both were unprepared, and only a sentence or so passed between them.

"You will not try and see—my wife—Viola," was Mr. Newnham's anxious question.

"I am leaving now—by to-night's mail, for London."

"That is well. She could not bear more agitation."

"My letter did not reach you, or it reached you too late?"

"You haven't had my answer, my explanation?" was Mr. Newnham's counter-question.

"No. I have reason to believe my letter was delayed—what was the date of its reaching you?"

Mr. Newnham, by the few necessary days, falsified the date.

"Too late, of course," said Lionel. "She had information upon which she calculated well,"

was comment made to himself. "I had left the island before your answer reached it—because I doubted but that my letter had been delayed, or destroyed."

That was almost all that passed. Each, for different reasons, felt the presence of the other all but intolerable. They talked calmly, and they parted courteously.

Mr. Newnham wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Would to God that the past could be undone!" he said; and yet, while he said it, and with soul-wrung bitterness of earnest, he thought, he knew, that had it to be done again, probably, it would be done as it had been done.

"What have I won that was worth such winning if she does not love me and I do not trust her!"

He half-resolved to tell Viola all, at once, and throw himself upon her tender merciful forgiveness. And then, to Rosalie's pleadings that the truth should be told, he answered as we have seen. But Rosalie did not know how much there was to tell. Without knowledge or intention Lionel had now filled up the measure of Rosalie's romantic devotion to the idea of him. She partly knew and partly guessed enough of the truth about Caspian to be able almost entirely to exonerate Lionel—not that

he had told her anything with the intention of exonerating himself: he had merely accounted to her for facts, missing letters, and so on.

Perhaps the most dangerous element to her own peace of heart and mind in her feelings towards Lionel, was her pity. While she extravagantly worshipped Lionel, she pitied him so intensely, was so absorbingly haunted by the haggard look of desolation worn on his face, by her notion of the desolateness of his heart and life—that to say she would gladly have given her life, either paid down at once, or day by day in daily service, to be of any comfort and joy to him, is merely to say that she loved him as she pitied, and pitied as she loved.

Often the cure for such a state of mind as Rosalie's would be the truth: to see the much-pitied hero in his daily life among men. But, in this instance, even this would have been no cure. Rosalie's sympathies pierced below the surface; and there, in truth, was desolation and despair enough. Not despair of life, not despair that would make Lionel wish to cease to live, or to cease to work. He had an indomitable toughness of ambition somewhere about him, but despair of happiness, of any sweetness in life.

“Oh! if only I had been really his sister, so

that I could live with him and take care of him always !” she thought.

After her father’s funeral, and when they were all at Newnham (all alterations and improvements there were for the present postponed, and the household from Orchardleigh translated to Newnham, except old John and Nancy, who preferred, as it was allowed them, to live on at Orchardleigh and keep the place in order), Rosalie had a serious illness. In many ways her nerves had been overstrained. Lionel’s face haunted her feverish dreams and her languid convalescence, the more that she might not speak of him. She might not speak of him ! And yet, how often, when Viola watched by her, one name would have named the thoughts of the watcher and the watched. Only Rosalie thought of Lionel in the flesh, and longed to minister with fleshly hands to his fleshly needs ; while Viola thought of him as never any more to be seen by mortal eyes, or to need the ministering of fleshly hands. How he died, and when, was what Viola yearned to know : and she wondered if any of those around her knew, and she wondered if the time would ever come when she should dare talk of him to her husband, and question her husband as to what he knew. At present she dared not. She knew by the soul experience she had gone through



on that evening when she had been alone with her dead father, that she dared not. She dared not trust herself to name his name—she dared not risk hearing his name. Viola would have been safer, because more on her guard, because her conscience would have taken just alarm, had she known the truth about Lionel, known that he was not dead. She never doubted but he was dead.

Rosalie often wondered, "Does he know I am ill? He is so good; I am sure he would be sorry." Lionel had said to her something about hearing of her sometimes through Nancy, that made her think he did not mean quite to forget her and to drop out of her life. Sometimes when she was very faint and weary in the weakness of her convalescence, she would feel as if, if only her longing could be satisfied, to rest her head on that kind shoulder, and have his brotherly arm round her (he had made it so rest and had so comforted her in the first outbreak of her sorrow for her father), she could at once be strong and well again.

At these times she would look up into Viola's face, with such eyes as Viola could not bear, though why she could not bear them Viola did not know. Often Viola suddenly stooped and kissed her because she could not bear these eyes; and once she said, when the reason why

Rosie's eyes were so hard to bear flashed upon her,

"You must not pity me, Rosie." And her face flushed when she had spoken, as it seldom flushed now, a burning, painful crimson, that left, when it faded, a marble-like cold whiteness.

Everybody was good to Rosalie, very, very good. Viola was her devoted nurse, was an angel. Vincent was very good and kind, and was a very wise and careful visitor to a sick-room; but with some secret something in her heart and soul, the sick girl craved for Lionel—to hear his voice, to see his face, his poor desolate face, to have his hand laid on her head, and all these things were for her, perhaps, for ever impossible. If only she could bring a happy smile to that face, if she could think of him as content; but the loneliness, the lovelessness, the desolation of his life haunted her. And, in all probability, she could never in her life be anything to him.

As soon as she was well enough, Rosalie was always at Orchardleigh. Her tireless lingering about the grounds of the deserted house was a source of perplexed anxiety to Viola, although she sympathized with the turning of the girl's heart towards the old home only too fully. Rosalie had a pony again, a little beauty, given to her by Vincent. She would ride over alone

to Orchardleigh, put her pony in the stable, and remain almost all day wandering to and fro, and in and out. She had a feeling of indefinite expectation. Not exactly of seeing Lionel, or even of hearing from him, but of hearing that Nancy had heard something of him. On the two occasions, during the winter, when she found a letter, all for her own self, calling her "sweet little sister and friend," she was beside herself with joy, with the glad feeling of proud possession. She answered these letters from Orchardleigh, and then the correspondence dropped. Lionel felt that to continue it would be an act of criminal self-indulgence, exposing others to danger and misunderstandings. It was no easy thing to him to refrain from this indulgence. The temptation to be in some way kept *en rapport* with Viola was a strong one; but the more strong he felt it the more he felt that its gratification would be dangerous.

In the spring-time Orchardleigh was a wilderness of blossom again; but already there was a romance of desolation breathing about the place, and this sense of desolation made it especially dear to the dreaming girl. More than ever she haunted it, but no more treasures fell to her share.

## CHAPTER VI.

## CASPIAN'S REVENGE.

AFTER leaving Orchardleigh Lionel remained a short time in London. He had business to do in London, people to see, reports to give, instructions to receive. His prolonged term of office had not yet expired, he was going out again within a few weeks, for a couple of years, then he meant to give up that sort of life, to work chiefly in literature, in which already he had made some mark. He was occupied and hurried. With what hope he had come to England, whether with any positive hope (for that delirious flash of delusion in the garden, when he had thought he had found his own Viola in the old place, free, had hardly been born of hope), with what hope, whether with any hope he hardly knew; but if with any, it was all dead now.

That Caspian had withheld either of the two most momentous letters, the letter in which he had confessed and had appealed to Viola, or her answer to that appeal, he could not yet un-

derstand as possible; for had he not himself locked his own letter safe into the bag? and had it not come back to him evidently direct from Viola? Yet, since talking with Rosie, he was quite sure that all would have been forgiven, that nothing would have been allowed by Viola to separate them, if that letter had reached her. That the cold blank cruelty of returning that letter to him without a word was impossible to Viola he felt more than ever. This matter remained a mystery. The last letter of all letters that he had written to her—the one enclosed to Newnham—had never been in her hands, he knew; but there was no mystery here. Caspian, as he had suspected when he started for England, had so delayed it that it should arrive just too late. She had been lately in correspondence with her obnoxious brother Dick—with his help it was easy to manage this. She had sworn to Lionel, with such terrible oaths, when something had roused his suspicion sufficiently to make him question her, that his letter had gone, and by the mail for which he had written it, that he hadn't dared doubt her. He understood now how this was true. It had gone, but not to its proper destination; she had enclosed it to that Dick, with her instructions—her fiendish instructions!

Caspian, and Caspian's works, had still, when

he left her, been to some extent perplexities to Lionel. Up to a time shortly before he had written to Mr. Newnham, he had still at times been able to think of her as no worse than an impassioned woman, reckless of everything but the gratification of her passion. Of course he had been a fool and blind to have been still, even to this extent, deluded; but many a man has been befooled and deluded by a far less clever and crafty woman. And Caspian had been so serviceable, so watchful—had shown, he thought, such dog-like fidelity, joined to such dog-like humility of gratitude for any crumb of kindness thrown to her, that she had assailed him from all sides, and hemmed him in, and at last he had got tired of detesting and distrusting her, had come to “half-believe true” to him, till, just before he had written to Mr. Newnham, he had had such a revelation of the real Caspian, as had made anything but distrust and detestation impossible for ever after.

One evening—one of the last evenings of his stay in town—he was told, on his return to his hotel, that “his lady” had arrived, and was waiting for him in his rooms. He was glad. The last settlement of accounts between them could be the sooner concluded. The man who had made the announcement closely followed Lionel into the room, carrying lights. To him

Lionel gave the order, "Have a carriage ready for Mrs. Beverley in a quarter of a hour : she nwill not stay here."

The man retreated, and Lionel waited to hear his footsteps die away in the distance before he spoke.

"You wonder what my order means?"

Lionel looked at Caspian now ; she was ghostly white and large-eyed, richly dressed, showing in her dress, at least, no signs of haste or desperation, but showing in her face signs of recent illness.

"I don't know why I should wonder about so simple a matter. You think these rooms not comfortable enough for a lady, and your wife ; but they would do, you being in them."

"You entirely misapprehend me. My order means that, at the end of a quarter of an hour, all that needs to be said between us will have been said : that longer than that I will not endure your presence—that, after that, we never meet again."

Silence from Caspian ; but he caught the sidelong glitter of her eyes, and was conscious how intensely she was observing him.

"First of all, why have you followed me here?"

"Because I am your wife—you are my husband."

"It is true the legal bond is not yet absolutely broken, but it soon shall be."

"Is it worth while now?" she sneered. "Of course I have seen by the papers that the happy event has taken place."

"Always worth while to separate oneself as far as possible from what is loathsome."

"Loathsome!—that word to me! I can make you suffer for it yet."

She stood before him, looking with her white face and her graceful figure, in its rich black robes, more like an outraged queen than a mean, sinful, deceitful, detected creature. He could not help being struck with her fragile look—that look of extreme delicacy had always been one of Caspian's strong weapons.

"No, Caspian, you can make me suffer no more. Neither my heart nor my honour are any longer in your power. I shall make a settlement upon you, as liberal as I am able, to be paid to you quarterly. I will impoverish myself that you may live luxuriously—that your soft white hands may never need to harden and roughen themselves; but I will never see you—never speak to you again! For any effort you make to thrust yourself upon me, you shall pay dearly."

"This to your wife!—such terms as you (in your pride, in your generosity) might offer to



the vilest of vile women! This is all I have to look for from your honour as a gentleman—from your gratitude as a man?"

Her eyes glowed with a reddish glow, but as to her face, it only glowed whiter.

"This is all. And there are circumstances which would induce me to withdraw even this. Above all, I would take my name from you—my name, which might have been hers—if I were able."

There was a moment's silence. Then Caspian, with a sudden change of mood, for which he was nowise prepared, threw herself at his feet, and clung about them in such a manner that he could not move and not trample on her. She seemed to writhe herself under them, crying, with that passionate iteration, the ring of which there was no mistaking—

"Try me once more—just a little. I could be good now, now I know she cannot get you. I could be good, if only you would love me ever so little, Lionel, ever so little, and not for long, Lionel, not for long! I shall soon die! See how thin I am!—see how white I am!—I shall soon die! Love me just a little till I die!"

She ran on with such entreaties as these, clinging about him, sometimes lifting herself till she could press his knees to her breast, then falling with her face on his feet again. It was

all genuine now, a desperate last fight for some hold on him. He stood silent, perfectly motionless. She went on till she was exhausted.

"Have you done?" he then asked her. The tone stung her to new strength—she sprang up. "It is too late for this sort of thing. As I listen to you, I think with too much disgust of other times, when I have yielded to it. You are not dangerous to me now, Caspian. I feel towards you as I might feel towards a poisonous reptile that had stung to death my nearest and dearest. I might not think it worthy my hate—it acted but according to its nature; but should I take it up and cherish it in my bosom? Neither will I you, Caspian."

As he met her eyes now, he had a momentary expectation that she might spring at his throat. But as she knew she had still some power to gnaw his heart, when she spoke next there was no passion in her voice or face—both were cold and hard and clear.

"You are a poor creature, Lionel Beverley; you are, after all, not the man such a woman as I might be should have loved. You are strong when it would become you to be weak, weak when it would have become you to be strong. In the past, for Viola's sake, it might have become you to be stern and strong; but it is not till there is only your precious self to be con-

sidered that you show any strength and sternness. It is now, when a little kindness to your dying wife could do no hurt to anyone, that you thrust her from you to live or die alone! That is the way," she went on after a pause, "with you people who consider yourselves good. You wear out your power of resistance, resisting when it might well become you to yield; and then, when the temptation comes, that it might be worth while to conquer, you yield. You are but a poor creature, and just fit for that Viola of yours. That Viola of yours, who, when she was a girl, would not leave her father for you, but who, doubtless, now she is a married woman, would run away from her husband to you, if you asked her!"

"Silence!" Lionel thundered.

"Try her. You will be well matched now. You a married man, she a married woman. Try her!"

"By Heaven——"

"Then again," she would speak, "there is that model of disinterested devotion in love, Viola's husband. What does he do when temptation comes?"

"Eh?" Lionel cried sharply.

"He yielded, basely and falsely!"

"He did not. You know you so contrived that my letter got to him too late."

"I meant it should have done so. Dick bungled. He got it nearly a week before the wedding."

"I can hear no more!—I can hear no more! Get you gone, or——"

"I have done. It is disinterested of me to have made the last disclosure; after it you will feel that if you choose to invite Viola to leave her husband, it is, after all, but wrong for wrong, and fraud for fraud. But you won't do that; and, perhaps, Viola wouldn't come to you. You are both such cowards, and so respectable! Oh! you are a poor creature! How I have loved you as I have done is a marvel to me. And yet, even as I speak, I know that with my last breath and to the end of my days I shall love you."

"I don't care to bandy reproaches with you, Caspian—all you say of me may be true; but a man owes it to himself to thrust out of his life a woman he has proved to be——"

She would not notice his words—she went on,

"Yes, such as you are, I have loved you, I do love you, I shall love you. How I have loved you! You have been my world. Your kindness my heaven, your unkindness my hell. How I have loved you!"

"Just once I must contradict you—you have not loved me. You don't know what love is.

You have not been capable of love. Does love seek the ruin and misery of the beloved, and of what the beloved holds dearest, as you have done? You have had for me what a woman such as you are calls love, what I could call by an ugly name, did I not stay my tongue in deference to the semblance of womanhood there is about you—a something the world would be the better for having blotted out. Don't speak to me of love, don't profane the word by your lips. Love!—of love you know nothing!"

"So it is I who know nothing of love—I who have all my life loved but one man; while Viola—you call hers love—what is she now then as the wife of another man? Is her love transferred, or, in his arms, does she love you? You dare hold me unworthy to speak of her!"

"Unworthy—yes. Only God and your own conscience know how unworthy. I don't care to hear details of how you plotted and planned. I only care to be rid of you—knowing I shall never have to see your face again. Go now, all that remains to be arranged can be arranged through a lawyer. Go now——"

He walked to the door and opened it.

"Before I go I make you a parting present." She took a packet of letters from her pocket; burst the band that held them together, scattered them. "There!" she cried, "they are

scorpions that will sting you to the quick. Her loving letters, to which you, cruel, sent no answer. Your grovelling abject scrawl to her which she never had, which while you slept I stole, which I replaced by a letter of my own to her; receiving which she yet wrote to you as you will see—the letter I took from her envelope—to give you your own back again in its place.”

Then she went; he heard the roll of the carriage-wheels that bore her away. He was alone.

He set the windows open. He wiped his brow and his hands. Then he picked up the scattered letters. He read Viola's, that last letter of Viola's. Drops of agony started to his forehead; even his hands were wet as if they had been dipped in water.

Caspian was avenged. There is no need to speak more of Caspian. She had worked out her work. Lionel had suffered his worst, and yet not quite his last at her hands. She managed to drag his name through the mud; keenly, though never again to the core, to wound him. For her he could never be an object of indifference; ceasing to love him, even as she called love, she hated him with restless, eager ingenuity of hate. At times she played the martyred wife. Succeeding at times in poisoning ears against him that he well-inclined to please. Once or twice confronting in a way to

shame him. She died at last, lost on a pleasure cruise, in a sudden southern tempest. She had gone to the south to recruit her fading life. She did not wish to die—she was afraid to die.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

